

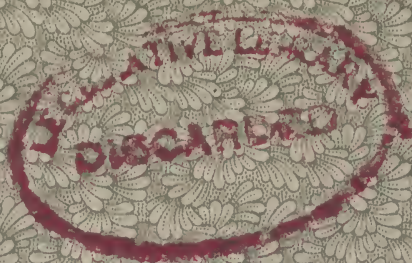
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NEWLY TRANSLATED BY
ALFRED ALLINSON

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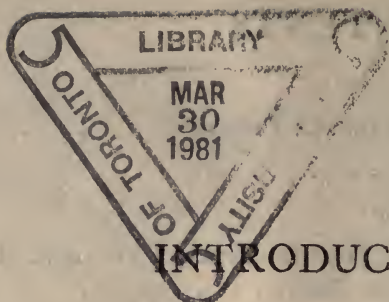
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READERS of the *Chevalier d'Harmental*—and who has not read it?—will remember the Cellamare conspiracy, the famous conspiracy for carrying off the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France, to a castle in Spain, establishing M. du Maine in his place, breaking the Quadruple Alliance, assisting the Pretender to invade England, and finally making Philip V., King of Spain, sovereign of half the world. That conspiracy, which, as will be seen, was not wanting in a certain grandeur, originated in the fertile brain of Philip's Minister, Alberoni, and was discovered by a humble employé named Jean Buvat. Buvat, given certain important documents in Spanish to copy for the Prince de Cellamare, handed these to Dubois, Foreign Secretary of State to the Duke of Orleans. It is true that historians usually give the credit, not to Buvat, but to a more notorious person, *La Fillon*, but Maquet, Dumas's collaborateur, in the course of his researches into the history of the Regency, stumbled on the truth of the matter, and carried his discovery, which he worked into a short story, to Alexandre. The latter from it constructed the long romance known as the *Chevalier d'Harmental*. The success of the book was great. Now, where one has led, others will follow, and it would appear that a certain M. Couailhac, who had already collaborated with Dumas in the writing of romances, studied in his turn the political intrigues of the time of the Regency. Maquet had discovered an interesting fact in connection with one of them, why should he not put his finger on the secret history of another? It would seem that M. Couailhac was struck with the circumstance that while some of the Cellamare conspirators were yet incarcerated in the Bastille, four Breton gentlemen named De Pontcalec, De Talhouët, De Montlouis, and Du Couëdic were arrested for their participation in a political intrigue which had the same ultimate object as that of the Prince de Cellamare and his friends, only that the first step to be taken by the Bretons was, very naturally, to separate Brittany from France, and declare its independence.

Whether M. Couailhac, who, we believe, was a gentleman of considerable ingenuity, did much more than whisper to Dumas the names of De Pontcalec, De Talhouët, De Montlouis, and Du Couëdic—names which it must be allowed are highly promising to a novelist, being suggestive of much mystery and romance—we do not know. Probably he did do more. He may well have thought that as the four conspirators seemed never to have left Brittany, there must have been a fifth in Paris. "What for?" may have asked Dumas. "Why, to kill the Regent, of course! The Cellamare people were wrong in planning to kidnap the Duke and take him a long journey into Spain, the simplest way to rid France of him was to kill him. Connect the rising in Brittany, the arrest of four Breton gentlemen—both well attested historical facts—with an imaginary conspiracy in Paris to kill the Regent, and you have, my dear Dumas, an excellent idea—one which will furnish the material for a sequel to your very entertaining *Chevalier d'Harmental*."

In some such manner as this may Dumas and Couailhac have conversed and begun to sketch out the plot of the romance which became the *Regent's Daughter*. Concerning the Cellamare conspiracy, Dumas had had ample historical details on which to work ; with this minor affair of De Pontcalec and his friends it was a different matter—little was to be gleaned about it—and Dumas's imagination had free play.

We have no intention now of entering upon any description of the thrilling but somewhat wild plot which Dumas and his friend evolved. But, as a few years after the publication of the *Regent's Daughter*, Dumas wrote a history of the Regency, we will give from it in our introduction to the second part of the romance his account of the conspiracy in question. Our readers, when they have read it, will be in a position to discriminate between fiction and history.

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THE REGENT'S DAUGHTER

PART I.—HÉLÈNE DE CHAVERNY

CHAPTER I

AN ABBESS OF THE EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY

IT was the eighth of February, 1719.

Just as the clocks were striking the hour of ten, a coach with two outriders, preceded by a mounted page, passed under the Gothic gateway which gave entrance to the Abbey of Chelles. On its panels were emblazoned the three fleurs-de-lis of France, charged in chief with the label of the cadet branch of Orleans. The vehicle drew up under the pillared portico of the main building; and the page, who had already leapt to the ground, sprang briskly to open the door for its two occupants to descend.

The first was a man of forty-five or forty-six, short, rather stout, and of a florid complexion. He bore himself easily and wore a marked air of breeding and authority.

The other, who descended the three steps with careful deliberation, was equally short of stature, but thin and frail; his face, if not precisely ugly, gave an unpleasant impression—which was in no way lessened by the keen shrewdness of the eyes and the sardonic lines of the mouth. The day was cold, and evidently he felt it, for he shivered beneath the folds of his ample cloak.

The first of the two made his way up the staircase nimbly and without hesitation, like a man well acquainted with the place. In the spacious ante-chamber he met several nuns who bowed deeply as he passed. He did not slacken his pace until he reached a reception room where, it must be confessed, the cloistral

austerity commonly associated with a Religious House was far from being obtrusively evident.

The second, who had followed leisurely, was saluted with almost equal deference by the nuns. He crossed the same apartments and quietly rejoined his companion in the salon.—“Stay here and warm yourself,” said the latter, “while I go and talk to her. In ten minutes I shall have scotched this scandal which you have brought to my notice. If she denies it and I should require proofs, I will call you.”

“Ten minutes, Monseigneur!” replied the man who wore the cloak. “It will be a couple of hours before your Highness has even broached the subject of your visit. A very clever woman is the Abbess of Chelles, and you have every reason to know it.” So saying, he dropped unceremoniously into an easy chair, extended his thin legs and planted his feet upon the fire-dogs.

“Yes, yes, I know it,” impatiently replied he who had been addressed as “your Highness.” “And you take care to remind me too often to give me an opportunity of forgetting. The devil of a man you are! Why did you drag me here to-day through all the wind and snow?”

“Because you refused to come yesterday, Monseigneur.”

“Yesterday, it was impossible. I had an appointment at five o'clock with my Lord Stair.”

“Ah! yes; at a little house in the Rue des Bons-Enfants. So then his Lordship no longer resides at the English Embassy?”

“Abbé, have I not forbidden you to set people to watch me?”

"Monseigneur, it is my duty to disobey you."

"Well, then, disobey; but at least permit me to tell lies without your having the impertinence to let me see that you know I am lying, merely for the sake of proving the efficiency of your agents."

"Monseigneur may rest easy in future—I will believe everything."

"I cannot undertake to return the compliment, Abbé, for just now I believe you are making a mistake."

"Monseigneur, what I have said is no more than I know, and I repeat it deliberately."

"But see for yourself! No lights, not a sound—a religious silence! You have been badly informed, my dear man; your agents are untrustworthy."

"Yesterday, Monseigneur, in this room, there was an orchestra fifty strong. Yonder, where that young sister is kneeling so devoutly, was a buffet. What was on the buffet I will not say, though I could. Over there on the left, where a modest supper of lentils and cream cheese is being prepared for the holy sisters, people were dancing, drinking and making——"

"Well, making what?"

"Egad, Monseigneur, making love—two hundred of them!"

"The devil they were! And you are quite sure of all this?"

"As sure as if I had seen it with my own eyes; and that is why you do well to come here to-day, and would have done better still had you come yesterday. This sort of life is unseemly for an Abbess, Monseigneur."

"True, but not altogether so unseemly for abbés.—for an abbé—you think?"

"Monseigneur, I am a politician."

"Well, if that is all, the Abbess, my daughter, is a politician too!"

"Ah! that hardly meets the case, Monseigneur. Still, if you are satisfied, by ail means let it remain there. I hold no pedantic views about morality, as you know. A new song or two, more or less, about myself—or others—what difference does it make? It pleases the good people of Paris . . . *O! Abbess fair, where art thou roaming?* would go very well with Abbé, Abbé, *where have you been?*"

"Well, well, wait for me here. I will go and read her a lecture."

"Take my word for it, Monseigneur, if you wish to do any good, you should speak to her here—here, in my presence.

I should be the better able to help you if your arguments should break down or your memory fail you. You would have but to make a sign for me to come to the rescue."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said the personage who had undertaken the office of redresser of wrongs, in whom we hope the intelligent reader has recognized Philippe d'Orléans, Regent of France. "Decidedly, this scandal must be abated,—at least, to some extent. The Abbess of Chelles must limit her receptions to two a week—these dances and crushes must be put a stop to. She must be a little more circumspect; the casual stranger must not be permitted free entrance to a convent as though it were a public square! Mademoiselle d'Orléans has chosen to forsake her proper sphere in order to enter the religious life; she has exchanged the Palais-Royal for Chelles. It was against my wishes. I opposed it in every possible way. Very well! an Abbess she must be for five days in the week—she will still have two days for playing the great lady, and she ought to find that sufficient."

"That is well, Monseigneur; you are beginning to see the matter in its right aspect."

"And that is how you wish me to see, is it not?"

"Why, of course. I should imagine that an abbess who keeps thirty footmen, fifteen lackeys, ten cooks, eight huntsmen and a pack of hounds—who fences, plays the 'cello and the saxhorn—who practices surgery and curls perukes—who lets off pistols and fireworks and turns chair-legs—I should think, Monseigneur, that an abbess of that description ought not to find life in a convent dull."

The Duke turned to address an elderly nun who was crossing the salon with a large bunch of keys in her hand. "Has my daughter not been informed of my arrival?" he asked. "I wish to know whether I am to go to her or wait for her here."

"Madame is coming, Monseigneur," replied the sister, bowing respectfully.

"I am pleased to hear it," said the Regent to himself. It occurred to him that her ladyship was treating him with scant courtesy either as a daughter or a subject.

"Now, Monseigneur, recall to your mind the story of the expulsion of the

money-changers from the temple; you must know it—at any rate you used to—for I taught it you among a host of other things when I was your tutor. Make a clean sweep of these Scribes and Pharisees—these comedians, musicians, anatomists and what not—or leave, say, three of a sort. There will still be enough of them left to form a tolerably strong escort for our return, I promise you!”

“Leave it to me; I feel the preaching-fervour rising within me.”

“That’s as it should be, for here she comes.” As Abbé Dubois spoke, the door which led to the interior of the convent opened, and the lady, whose arrival had been so impatiently expected, appeared.

A few words will suffice to sketch the portrait of the young woman whose repeated follies had at length succeeded in rousing the indignation of Philippe d’Orléans, the most tolerant of men, and the most indulgent of fathers within the broad realms of France or Navarre.

Louise-Adelaide d’Orléans, Duchesse de Chartres, was the second and the most beautiful of the Regent’s three daughters. She had a clear skin, a brilliant complexion, fine eyes, a beautiful figure and delicate hands; her teeth especially were magnificent, and her grandmother, the Princess Palatine, has compared them to a necklace of pearls in a casket of coral. Moreover, she danced well, and sang even better. She could read music perfectly at sight, having been taught by Cauchereau, one of the principal artists at the Opera, under whom she had made more rapid progress than is usually the case with lady pupils, especially when they happen to be princesses. True it is that Mademoiselle d’Orléans had devoted herself with ardour to her studies. The secret of this assiduity will before long be revealed to the reader, as it had been to the Duchesse, her mother.

For the rest, all her tastes were those of a man. Mademoiselle de Chartres seemed to have exchanged sex and character with her brother Louis. She was fond of dogs and horses; her days were spent in fencing, in shooting with pistol or carbine or in making fireworks. She cared for none of the things with which women occupy themselves,—indeed she scarcely gave a thought to her personal appearance, which, as we have said, was well worth a little trouble.

Music, however, was her chief amuse-

ment, and she became almost fanatically devoted to it. She rarely missed a night at the Opera when her master, Cauchereau, was singing. On such occasions she would forget her rank, and applaud the artist with a woman’s enthusiasm. Once, when he surpassed himself in a difficult *aria*, she went so far as to exclaim, “Bravo, bravo! my dear Cauchereau!”

The Duchesse d’Orléans judged not only that the applause was excessive, but that the exclamation was even indiscreet from a princess of the blood. She decided that her daughter was sufficiently instructed in music; and Cauchereau received, with a handsome acknowledgment of his services, the intimation that, the musical education of his pupil being quite finished, there would be no occasion for him to present himself again at the Palais-Royal. Further, the Duchesse proposed to her daughter that she should spend a fortnight at the Convent at Chelles, the Abbess of which was a sister of the Maréchal de Villars, whom she honoured with her friendship.

No doubt it was during this fortnight that Mademoiselle de Chartres, who, as Saint-Simon has declared, “did everything by leaps and bounds,” embraced the resolution of renouncing the world. At any rate, it was towards the end of Lent in the year 1718 that she asked and received the permission of her father to stay in the Abbey of Chelles during Holy Week. This time, however, instead of returning to the palace to resume the place she occupied as a princess of the blood, she asked to be allowed to remain at Chelles as a nun.

The Duke, who considered the Church was already sufficiently represented in his family, in the person of his legitimate son Louis, whom he called “the monk,”—to say nothing of a natural son who was Abbé of Saint-Albin—did his utmost to oppose this request, which he could only regard as a strange freak on the part of the Princess. It is probable that her father’s opposition rendered her obstinate; however that may be, the Duke was obliged to yield, and on the 23rd of April, 1718, Mademoiselle de Chartres finally pronounced her vows. Afterwards, reflecting that his daughter, in becoming a nun, had not ceased to be a princess of the blood, the Duke entered into negotiations with Mademoiselle de

Villars, who, in consideration of a pension of twelve thousand livres, consented to resign her vocation, and the Princess was named Abbess of Chelles in her stead. Her strange manner of life during the year she had already occupied the exalted position, had, as we have seen, caused the Regent and his Minister to interfere. Such, then, was the character of the Abbess of Chelles who coolly appeared before her father, regardless of the fact that she had kept him waiting. No longer was she surrounded by an elegant and unorthodox court, for the gay revellers of the previous night had flitted with the first rays of dawn. On the contrary, she was followed by a procession of six nuns, draped in black and carrying lighted candles.

This spectacle caused the Regent to think that his daughter was in a penitential mood and wished to deprecate his wrath. In place of the frivolity he had expected to witness, he was astonished to see the sober habit of the sisters, and the corresponding deportment of their Abbess. Still, when he reflected upon the unconscionable time he had had to wait, he thought it extremely likely that it had been spent in preparing this solemn ceremony for his benefit.

"I do not like hypocrisy," he said sharply. "I can easily forgive a fault; but it must not be hidden under the garb of virtue. All these lights, Madame, are no doubt the remains of last night's illumination. Come, now, are all the flowers faded and all your guests tired out, that you cannot show me a single bouquet nor a single dancer?"

"Monsieur," replied the Abbess, in a tone of reproof, "this is not the place to seek worldly amusements."

"I see, at any rate," rejoined the Duke, glancing at the solemn apparitions who accompanied his daughter, "that if yesterday was a feast, to-day is a fast."

"Oh! if you have come here to catechize, Monsieur . . . But if your Highness has been listening to accusations against me, what you see should be sufficient answer."

"I came to tell you, Madame," replied the Regent, irritated that his daughter should deem him so easily hoodwinked, "I came here to tell you that the life you are leading does not please me. Yesterday your conduct was unbecoming an Abbess. Your austerities to-day are

absurd for one of your rank. You have to choose once for all whether you will be an abbess or a princess. Your name is beginning to be mentioned lightly, and I have enemies enough of my own, without your making new ones for me here in your convent."

"Ah! Monsieur," said the Abbess, in a tone of resignation, "in entertaining my friends with balls and concerts—by the way, I am told they are spoken of as the best in Paris—and in seeking to amuse my friends, I have succeeded in pleasing neither you nor your enemies, nor even in pleasing myself. And really, when I live a quiet life, the result seems to be worse. Yesterday I said my last farewells to the world; I have now definitely taken leave of it, and, before I heard of your visit, I had adopted the resolution from which I do not intend to depart."

"What resolution?" asked the Regent, apprehensive of this new phase of his daughter's eccentricity.

"Come to this window and look out," said the Abbess.

In compliance with this invitation, the Regent went to the window. In the middle of the courtyard he saw a huge bonfire blazing. Dubois, who was as inquisitive as if he had really been an Abbé, approached and looked out also. Around this fire people were hurrying to and fro, casting into the flames various objects of singular shape.

"What is all this?" asked the Regent of Dubois, who appeared equally surprised.

"You mean, what are they burning?" said the Abbé.

"Yes."

"It looks like—yes, upon my word! it is—it is a violoncello!"

"Yes, it is my 'cello," said the Abbess, "and an excellent one, too. It is by Valéry."

"And you are *burning* it!" exclaimed the Duke.

"All such instruments are a means of perdition," said the Abbess, in a tone which seemed to indicate the most heartfelt contrition.

"Why! and there is a harpsichord!" broke in the Duke.

"Mine also, Monsieur. It was such a splendid instrument that it used to distract my thoughts to the fleeting vanities of this world. I renounced it this morning."

"And that mass of papers with which they are feeding the fire?" asked Dubois, to whom this spectacle seemed to afford the most lively interest.

"My music, which I am having burnt."

"Your music?" exclaimed the Regent.

"Yes; and your own as well," said the Abbess. "If you watch carefully, you will see your opera *Panthea* thrown in when its turn comes. Of course you will understand that, having once made my resolution, half-measures were out of the question."

"Well, this time you must be really mad! To light your bonfire with sheets of music, and then to feed it with clavichords and bass-violis is a trifle too extravagant."

"Monsieur, I am doing penance."

"H'm, you should rather say that you wish a change of furniture, and this is your excuse for buying new, since, no doubt, you are tired of the old."

"No, Monseigneur, that is not the case at all."

"Then tell me, what is your object? Confess frankly."

"Well, I am tired of amusing myself, and, for the future, intend to make a drastic change in my mode of life."

"What are you going to do?"

"At this moment I am going with these nuns, to visit the crypt in order to inspect the spot I have chosen for my last resting-place?"

"Deuce take me if she is not out of her mind at last!" exclaimed the Abbé.

"It will be truly edifying, will it not, Monsieur?" continued the Abbess gravely.

"Indeed I have not the slightest doubt, if you really do what you say, that it will cause more amusement to the public than even your supper-parties!"

"Do you care to accompany us, Monsieur?" the Abbess went on, "I am going to lie in my coffin for a few minutes; it is a fancy I have long wished to gratify."

"You will have plenty of time for that, Madame," said the Regent. "Besides, this whim of yours lacks the merit of originality. Charles the Fifth, who became a monk much in the same way as you turned nun—for no reason in particular—was the inventor of this form of entertainment, if I remember rightly."

"Then you will not go with me, Monsieur?" said the Abbess.

"I? Certainly not!" replied the Duke, who hated such morbid ideas. "I go to look at tombs? Listen to a ghastly chanting of *De profundis*? Good heavens, no! Indeed, I am only reconciled to the existence of tombs and funeral chants by the thought that, in my own case, I need expect neither to see the one nor hear the other."

"Ah! Monsieur," said the Abbess in a tone of pained remonstrance, "then you do not believe in the immortality of the soul?"

"I believe you have quite taken leave of your senses.—Deuce take you, Abbé! you promised me an orgy, and you bring me to see a funeral procession!"

"Faith, Monsieur," said Dubois, "I'm inclined to think I should prefer yesterday's extravagances. They were more cheerful certainly."

The Abbess gave her visitors a parting bow, and moved towards the door. The Duke and the Abbé looked at one another, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or be angry.—"Just a word more," said the Regent to his daughter; "tell me, have you quite made up your mind, or have you merely picked up these notions from your Confessor? If you have quite decided, I have no more to say; but if it is a passing fever, the sooner you are on the road to recovery the better. I will send you Moreau or Chirac, whom I pay to attend to my health and that of my family."

"Monseigneur," replied the Abbess, "you forget that I have sufficient knowledge of medicine to enable me to cure myself if I thought I needed it. I can assure you that my health is excellent. I am a Jansenist, that is all."

"Ah!" cried the Duke, "there I perceive the handiwork of that Benedictine rascal Ledoux, confound him!—Well, I know of a treatment which will cure *that* fellow, anyhow."

"And what is that?" inquired the Abbess.

"*The Bastille!*" replied the Duke, grimly. With this parting shot, he left the convent in a rage, followed by Dubois, laughing unrestrainedly.

"You see now," said the Regent to Dubois, after a long interval of silence, and as they were nearing Paris, "you see you were quite wrong; with every desire to inflict a sermon, I was obliged to submit to one myself."

"Well, well, as a father you are to be envied, that's all. I congratulate you upon the reformation of your younger daughter, Mademoiselle de Chartres; unfortunately the elder, the Duchesse de Berri——"

"Oh! don't speak to me about her, Dubois, it is a sore point with me. Still, now I'm in a bad temper——"

"Well?"

"I've a good mind to profit by the occasion and settle with her once and for all."

"Is she at the Luxembourg?"

"I believe so."

"To the Luxembourg we must go, then, Monseigneur."

"Are you coming, too?"

"I refuse to leave you at all to-night."

"Nonsense!"

"I have certain designs with regard to you."

"Really?"

"I am taking you to a supper-party."

"Any ladies present?"

"To be sure."

"How many?"

"Two."

"How many men?"

"Two."

"Ah! a *partie carrée*?" remarked the Prince.

"Exactly."

"Will it be amusing?"

"I think I can promise."

"You are undertaking a big responsibility if you say that."

"Your Highness is fond of novelty?"

"Certainly."

"And likes to be surprised?"

"Yes."

"Well, we shall see. That's all I can say at present."

"Very well. So, then, after we leave the Luxembourg, where do we go?"

"To the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

This arrangement having been decided upon, the coachman was ordered to drive to the Luxembourg instead of to the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER II

A FAMILY REFORMATION

THE Duchesse de Berri, whom the Regent was about to visit, was as the apple of his eye, in spite of anything he might have said to the contrary. Having at the age of seven contracted an illness which the doctors declared beyond their power to cure, she had in the last resort been nursed into convalescence by her father, who, it is well known, claimed some pretensions to medical knowledge. His treatment proved effective, and her life was saved. To this circumstance is to be attributed the extreme fondness with which he regarded this favourite daughter. From that time forward, the child, who was naturally wilful and disobedient, was allowed to do exactly as she pleased. Consequently, her education was neglected; this, however, proved no hindrance to her being chosen by Louis XIV. as the wife of his grandson, the Duc de Berri.

How the descendants of the *Grand Monarque*—the Dauphin, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne, and the Duc de Berri were stricken down within a few years, is a matter of history and need not be repeated here.

Finding herself left a widow at the age of twenty, the Duchesse de Berri had been obliged to choose between the society of Versailles and that of the Palais-Royal. She was young, beautiful and fond of pleasure; she was almost as devotedly attached to her father as he to her; without hesitation she returned to the Palais-Royal and shared all the gaieties and even the follies of the Duke. The voice of scandal was not long in making itself heard. From Saint-Cyr and Sceaux—that is to say, from Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Maine—atrocious stories were circulated with regard to the young widow's conduct. The Duc d'Orléans, with his habitual indifference, allowed these rumours to pass unchallenged; and though they are historically groundless, they have nevertheless furnished the Revolutionists of a later period with a convenient text for preaching the depravity, undeniable in itself, of the ruling class. This, indeed, might well have been exposed without recourse to fiction.

The Duchesse de Berri already was

possessed of the ample revenue of six hundred thousand livres, but the Duke, in his fond partiality towards his favourite daughter, had taxed his private revenues in order to allow her an additional four hundred thousand, thus increasing her annual income to a million. Not contented with this, he had made over to her the Luxembourg, and had placed a company of guards at her service. Finally, to the unspeakable exasperation of all who held by the rigid etiquette of former times, the Duke had merely shrugged his shoulders when he heard of his daughter's exploit, viz., her progress through Paris preceded by trumpets and cymbals—a grave scandal to all proper-minded persons—and he had only laughed at the manner in which she had received the Venetian Ambassador, seated upon a throne raised on *three* steps—a piece of presumption which had given rise to serious diplomatic incidents between France and the Republic on the lagoons.

Nor did even this fill the measure of the Regent's delinquencies. It was rumoured that the Duke was about to comply with another monstrous demand on the part of his daughter, viz., to grant her the exclusive use of a royal box at the opera. This last enormity would no doubt have excited a rebellion among the nobility; but fortunately for the tranquillity of the State, if unhappily for the Regent's peace of mind, the Duchesse de Berri suddenly took it into her head to fall in love with De Riom.

The Chevalier de Riom was a younger son of a good family of Auvergne, and a near relation of the Duc de Lauzun. He had come to Paris in 1715 to seek his fortune, and chance had led him to the Luxembourg. Madame de Mouchy, whose lover he was, had presented him to the Princess; and soon he established the same influence over her that his uncle, the Duc de Lauzun, had exercised over La Grande Mademoiselle fifty years earlier. Before long the Chevalier was openly acknowledged as her lover, in spite of the bitter lamentations of his predecessor Lahaie, which were promptly suppressed by his being sent to Denmark as Attaché to the Embassy.

The Duchesse de Berri had never exceeded the number of two lovers: Lahaie, whom she had never acknowledged, and Riom, whom she proclaimed publicly. This rare moderation will en-

title her to be considered, for a woman of her rank and period, as comparatively virtuous. Her love-affairs cannot therefore be held to be sufficient cause for the malignant slanders with which the poor Princess was persecuted. It must not be forgotten, however, that the true reasons of this implacable hatred are to be found, not only in Saint-Simon's writings, but in all the memoirs of the period. It is plain that her unfortunate progress through Paris accompanied by a brass band, the reception of the Venetian Ambassador, and finally, her presumptuous demand of a box at the opera after having been accorded a body-guard, were the principal exciting causes of those calumnies to which we refer.

It was not, however, these general and public reasons for indignation which had roused the Regent's anger against his daughter. His exasperation was due to the extraordinary influence which the Duchesse had permitted her lover to gain over her. The Chevalier de Riom was a worthy pupil of that Duc de Lauzun who one morning had crushed the hand of the Princesse de Monaco beneath the heel of the boot which, that same evening, he had made the daughter of Gaston d'Orléans pull off. This De Lauzun had given his nephew brutal advice for the regulation of his conduct towards princesses—advice which the Chevalier had followed to the letter. "The daughters of France," he had said, "must be ruled with a rod of iron." Riom, having full confidence in his uncle's experience, had indeed so skilfully dragged the Duchesse de Berri, that she scarcely dared to give orders for an entertainment without first consulting him, or to appear at the opera, or even to wear a new costume, without his express permission and approval.

Consequently the Duc d'Orléans, who was tenderly attached to his daughter, hated the Chevalier—who, for his part, took care to keep out of the Regent's way—as bitterly as it was possible for a man of his easy temperament to hate anyone. Under pretext of gratifying the Duchesse, he had given Riom the command of a regiment, then the governorship of Cognac, and finally, the order to retire to his government. To persons of discernment, this last attention made all the previous favours wear very much the appearance of a disgrace.

Certainly the Duchesse had not been deceived. Although severely indisposed, she hastened to the Palais-Royal and importuned her father to rescind the order, but without result. She then grew angry and scolded, equally in vain. At last she went away uttering fearsome threats, and declaring that, in spite of her father's commands, Riom should not leave Paris. The Duke's sole reply had been to repeat his orders for the Chevalier's departure next morning, and Riom had respectfully promised prompt obedience.

That same day, in fact—which was the day previous to that upon which our story opens—Riom had ostensibly quitted the Luxembourg, and the Duc d'Orléans had been told by Dubois himself that the new Governor, accompanied by a numerous equipage, had set out for Cognac at nine o'clock in the morning.

Meanwhile the Duke had not again seen his daughter. He had spoken to Dubois of profiting by his anger to go and finish with her, but in reality he intended to seek her forgiveness rather than to prolong the quarrel. Dubois, who was well acquainted with the Regent's character, had not been deceived by his pretended vigour; but Riom having left for Cognac, Dubois was satisfied, for that was all he required. He hoped, during the Chevalier's absence, to be able to supplant him by some new private secretary or lieutenant of the Guards who would succeed in effacing Riom's memory from the Princess's heart. Afterwards, the Chevalier would receive the order to join the army under the Duc de Berwick in Spain, and there no doubt he would be as completely forgotten as Lahaie had been in Denmark.

This manœuvre, although perhaps not to be defended upon grounds of strict morality, was none the less astute and likely to prove successful. Whether or not the minister had confided more than half of this scheme to his master we should hesitate to say.

The coach drew up before the Luxembourg, which was lit up as usual. The Duke sprang out and mounted the staircase with his accustomed vivacity. Dubois, whom the Duchess loathed, remained huddled in a corner of the vehicle.

A minute later the Duke re-appeared at the carriage door wearing an expression of disappointment.

"What!" cried Dubois, "have you been refused admittance, Monseigneur?"

"No, no; but the Duchess is not at home."

"Where is she?—at the Carmelites?"

"She has gone to Meudon."

"To Meudon? In the month of February, and in such weather as this! Monseigneur, this sudden desire for country air strikes me as not altogether natural."

"I confess I'm inclined to agree with you. What on earth can she want at Meudon?"

"We can easily find out."

"How?"

"By going to Meudon."

"To Meudon! coachman," cried the Regent, jumping into the carriage. "I give you five-and-twenty minutes to get there."

"Your Highness will pardon me," said the coachman respectfully, "if I make so bold as to say that the horses have already done ten leagues."

"Drive them to death if necessary, but be at Meudon in twenty-five minutes."

To an order so precise there was no answer to be made. The driver whipped up his animals, which, astonished that such noble beasts as themselves could deserve such treatment, set off at a hand-gallop, apparently as fresh as though they had just left the stables.

Throughout the drive Dubois was silent and the Duke thoughtful. From time to time they scanned the route, but nothing could be seen to arrest the attention of the Regent or his Minister. Soon they arrived at Meudon, the Duke still plunged in a whirl of conflicting conjectures.

This time both alighted, for Dubois, thinking that the interview might be a long one, was anxious to find a place where he could wait in more comfort than in a coach.

In the doorway they encountered a Swiss in full uniform. As the Duke and Dubois were both heavily cloaked, the man stopped them. The Duke made himself known.

"Pardon," said the Swiss, "I did not know your Highness was expected."

"Well, expected or not, here I am," said the Duke. "Send word to the Princess."

"Then your Highness wishes to be present at the ceremony?" asked the

Swiss, evidently embarrassed, for no doubt he had received strict instructions.

"His Highness will be present of course," put in Dubois, before the Duke had time to inquire as to the nature of the ceremony. "And I shall be there as well."

"So? . . . Then I conduct Monseigneur at voice to the chapel?"

Dubois and the Duke looked at one another in bewilderment. "To the chapel?" repeated the Duc.

"Yes, Monseigneur. The ceremony was begun nearly twenty minutes ago."

"Upon my word!" whispered the Duke to Dubois, "I believe she intends to become a nun too!"

"Monseigneur," replied the minister, "I'd rather wager she is going to be married."

"Damnation!" cried the Duke, "that would be the climax!" He rushed up the stairs, followed by Dubois.

"One moment—I show your Highness the way," shouted the intelligent Swiss.

"No need—I know the way," cried the Duke, already at the head of the stairs. With the agility so surprising in a man of his corpulent build, the Regent hastened along corridors and through apartments, always followed by Dubois, stimulated to unusual exertion this time by the devil of curiosity which led him to play the part of Mephistopheles to the Duc d'Orléans, who at that moment was as eager to probe strange secrets as any Faust.

On reaching the door of the chapel, they found it closed, but it yielded to the first pressure of the Regent's hand.

Dubois had not been mistaken in his conjecture. Riom, who had returned secretly, was kneeling beside the Princess. Her Highness's private chaplain stood before them; whilst M. de Pons, a relation of the Chevalier, and the Marquis de la Rochefoucault, Captain of the Princess's guards, supported the canopy over their heads. On the left of the Duchess stood M. de Mouchy, and on the right of the Chevalier was M. de Lauzun.

"Decidedly, we are the sport of unkind fortune," said Dubois. "We have come upon the scene just a couple of minutes too late."

"Sdeath!" cried the exasperated Duke taking a step towards the altar, "that remains to be seen!"

"Monseigneur," said Dubois, "it is my

duty as a Clerk in Orders to prevent your committing sacrilege. If it would serve any useful purpose," he added, "I don't say. As matters stand, it would be merely stupid."

"What! you mean to tell me they are married?" asked the Duke, stepping back behind a pillar under the pressure of the Abbé's restraining hand.

"Married they are indeed, Monseigneur. The devil himself could not unmarry them now, unless he availed himself of the Pope's assistance."

"I will write to Rome," said the Duke excitedly.

"Nothing of the sort, Monseigneur. Don't fritter away your influence on such a matter as this, for you will need it all when it becomes a question of my being elected Cardinal."

"But it is intolerable that my daughter should be married to such a man!"

"It is a *mésalliance*, true, but they are very much the fashion," said Dubois. "Who marries according to his rank nowadays? His Majesty Louis XIV. himself set the fashion by marrying Madame de Maintenon—to whom, by the way, you still pay her pension as his widow. Then La Grande Mademoiselle made a *mésalliance* in marrying M. de Lauzun; you did the same with Mademoiselle de Blois—why, it is notorious that your mother, the Princess Palatine, slapped your face when she heard the announcement. Then again, myself—did I not make a *mésalliance* when I married the daughter of a village schoolmaster? In the face of so many illustrious examples, Monseigneur, surely you can have no reason to object to the Princess, your daughter, marrying whomsoever she pleases."

"Hold your tongue, demon!"

"Besides, you know, Monseigneur," continued Dubois, "your daughter's *liaison* began to be talked about rather more than is precisely desirable—thanks to that blatant ass the Abbé of Saint-Sulpice. Indeed, it was a public scandal: and this marriage, which by to-morrow will be known all over Paris, will put a stop to it. Nobody will have anything further to complain of—not even yourself. Decidedly, Monseigneur, the family is settling down!"

The Duc d'Orléans rapped out an oath, to which Dubois replied by a laugh which Satan himself might have envied.

"Silence there!" cried the Swiss, not knowing who was causing the noise, and anxious that the newly-married couple should lose not a word of the improving homily addressed to them by the Chaplain.

"Silence!" repeated Dubois. "You see, Monseigneur, you are interrupting the ceremony."

"Really, it wouldn't surprise me if she had us turned out if we make ourselves heard," replied the Duke.

"Sh!" The Swiss frowned reprovingly, and tapped the floor with the butt of his halberd. The Duchesse de Berri sent De Mouchy to enquire the cause of the disturbance. The latter trotted down the aisle, and catching sight of two persons apparently trying to hide, he approached them with his nose in the air.—"Come, what's all this noise?" he demanded fussily. "Who gave you people permission to enter the chapel?"

"I've a good mind to have you all thrown out of the window!" replied the Regent, heatedly. "But for the moment I shall content myself with ordering you to acquaint M. de Riom that he is to set out for Cognac *at once*, and to intimate to the Duchesse de Berri that in future she will not be received at the Palais-Royal."

The Regent left the chapel accompanied by Dubois, leaving the fat little Duc de Lauzun in a state of speechless surprise at his unexpected appearance.

"To the Palais-Royal!" cried the Prince, throwing himself back in the carriage.

"What's that?" said Dubois, quickly. "Monseigneur, you are forgetting our appointment: I came with you only on the understanding that you should go with me afterwards. Coachman! drive to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

"Go to the devil, Dubois! I'm not hungry."

"Well, your Highness is not obliged to have supper."

"And I'm not in the humour for amusement."

"Very well, there shall be no amusement."

"What do you want me to do, then?"

"Your Highness will watch others having supper and amusing themselves, that's all."

"What are you driving at?"

"I mean to say that your Highness

is about to see more miracles; and, since they are not of daily occurrence, it would be a pity to stop half-way. You have already witnessed two extraordinary spectacles, and now we are going to be present at a third."

"A third?"

"Certainly. There is luck in odd numbers. *Numero deus impare gaudet*. I trust you have not forgotten your Latin, Monseigneur?"

"Come, explain yourself," said the Regent testily, for he was in no humour to listen to the Abbé's pleasantries. "You are ugly enough, in all truth, to figure as the Sphinx, but damme if I'm young enough to act the part of *Cedipus*!"

"Well, then, Monseigneur, I have to tell you that, after finding your two daughters both too foolish to take the first step towards reformation, you are about to see your son, too wise hitherto, take his first steps in the paths of folly."

"My son Louis?"

"Precisely. To-night, you will observe that your son is brightening up,—a spectacle which cannot fail to be pleasing to you as a father." The Duke shook his head doubtfully.—"Oh! you may shake your head," continued Dubois, "but so it is."

"And how will this change affect him?"

"In every way, Monseigneur. I have chosen the Chevalier de M—— to initiate him into the ways of this wicked world. At this moment he is at supper with the Chevalier and a couple of ladies."

"Who are these ladies?" asked the Regent.

"I know only one of them. The Chevalier has undertaken to bring the other."

"And did Louis consent to be present?"

"He accepted the invitation very prettily."

"Upon my soul, Dubois, if you had lived in the time of Saint Louis, I believe you would have contrived to introduce him to the *La Fillon* of the period!"

The little Abbé felt flattered, and his ape-like features wrinkled into a smile. "You wished, I know, Monseigneur," he continued, "that Louis should have occasion to use his sword—just once, at least—as you yourself were constantly in

the habit of doing, and would now, if you could find an opportunity. I have so contrived that your desire shall be gratified."

"Really?"

"Yes. The Chevalier de M—— will find a means during supper of fixing a little quarrel upon Monsieur Louis; trust him to manage it neatly. You wished your son also to acquire the assurance which is best learned from associating with pretty women. The siren he meets to-night is charming enough to turn the head of St. Anthony."

"Your own selection, no doubt, Abbé?"

"Why, of course, Monseigneur! When it is a question concerning the honour of your family, your Highness knows that I give it my personal attention. The supper-party for to-night, then, and the duel for to-morrow morning. By to-morrow evening M. Louis d'Orléans will have shown himself a true son of his father—which fact, from his singular behaviour hitherto, one might have felt inclined to doubt!"

For the first time since he had left the Abbey of Chelles, the Duke burst into a laugh.—"You dog! I see what you would be at," he said. "It is not enough, then, that you have ruined the father's morals, but you must needs contrive to ruin the son."

"As you please, Monseigneur," replied Dubois. "Your son, being a prince, must act like a prince; he is not a monk, then let him be a man! He is your only son—he will soon be sixteen years of age. You would not make a soldier of him because he is your only son. A good excuse; but the fact was that you didn't know how he would stand fire."

"Dubois!" cried the Regent.

"Well, Monseigneur, to-morrow we shall see."

"A nice little plot, truly!" said the Regent.

"And I dare say you really believe he will acquit himself creditably," continued Dubois, coolly.

"Dubois, you scoundrel, you are becoming insufferable! You would appear to insinuate that it is an impossibility for any descendant of mine to understand how a man should behave among women—and a miracle if any prince of my name should be brought to face an opponent

sword in hand. Well, well, Dubois, you were born an Abbé, and you will die an Abbé!"

"Not at all, Monseigneur. Plague take it! I aspire to something better than that?"

The Duke exploded with mirth.—"You, at least, have ambition,—you are not like our ladylike Master Louis, who has not sense enough to wish for anything. But you can't imagine how much amusement that ambition of yours affords me."

"Really!" said Dubois. "I had no idea I was so funny."

"That's your modesty, my dear man. For indeed you are the funniest little scamp unchanged—unless it is when you are the most provoking. I am prepared to swear that the day they make you archbishop—"

"Cardinal, Monseigneur!"

"Oh! 'tis a Cardinal you wish to be, is it?"

"By way of filling up the time until I am Pope."

"Excellent! Well, I swear, when that day comes—"

"The day I am elected Pope?"

"No, the day you are made Cardinal—I'll wager everybody at the Palais-Royal will split themselves with laughter."

"They'll laugh in a very different fashion in Paris, though. Still, as your Highness suggested, I am somewhat of a buffoon at times, and I like to be the cause of merriment. That's the reason I am anxious to be Cardinal."

As Dubois was making this ingenuous confession, the carriage came to a full stop.

CHAPTER III

THE RAT AND THE MOUSE

THE carriage had pulled up in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in front of a house encircled by a high wall, behind which rose tall poplar trees, as though to conceal the house from the very wall itself.

"Why, it's somewhere in this neighbourhood, I fancy, that the little house belonging to Nocé is to be found," said the Regent.

"Monseigneur has an excellent

memory. The fact is I begged the loan of the house for to-night."

"I trust at least you have carried the thing out in proper style, Dubois. Will the supper be worthy the attention of a Prince of the blood?"

"I gave directions for everything myself. Ah! Monsieur Louis will be treated handsomely: he will be waited upon by his father's lackeys; he will enjoy the privilege of abusing his father's cook; he will be in a position to make love to—"

"To whom?"

"You shall see for yourself. What the devil! I must leave *something* for a surprise!"

"And the wines?"

"From your own cellar, Monseigneur. I am hoping that the hereditary liquors will inspire the hereditary courage, for it has long been conspicuously lacking."

"You didn't find all this fuss necessary to incite *my* courage, eh? you old reprobate."

"As an instructor of youth I am eloquent and persuasive, but I'm obliged to admit that in your case I had no occasion to strain my powers. Let us go in."

"You have the key, then?"

"Of course I have!" and Dubois drew from his pocket the article in question, and inserted it discreetly in the lock. The door opened silently, and closed behind the Duke and his minister with equal quietness. A well-educated door, you would have said, a discreet door that knew its duty towards a nobleman who honoured it by passing in.

From the inner room a light penetrated the drawn blinds; and the illustrious visitors were informed by the footmen stationed in the hall that the entertainment had begun.

"Abbé, you have achieved a triumph!" said the Regent.

"Sh! Follow me, but not a word!"

The Regent stealthily advanced behind Dubois into the room adjoining the dining-room, and communicating with it by folding doors, which were thrown back, and the opening partially screened by a bank of flowers. Through and between the flowers a perfect view was obtainable of the guests in the dining-room.

"Halloa, halloa!" whispered the Regent, "it seems to me I know this room."

"Better than you think, Monseigneur;

but don't forget that, whatever you may see or hear, you keep silence, or speak in a whisper."

"Make your mind easy."

The worthy pair crept towards the opening, and took up a kneeling position upon an ottoman. Bending aside the flowers, they were able to observe comfortably everything that took place within.

The Regent's son Louis, a youth of between fifteen and sixteen years of age, was seated in an arm-chair with his face towards the spot where his father was hidden. At the opposite side of the table, with his back turned towards the two spectators, sat the Chevalier de M—, and the *partie carrée*, which Dubois had promised the Regent, was completed by two women, rather more dazzlingly attired than was compatible with refined taste, one of whom sat by the young Prince, the other by the Chevalier. The youthful host of this convivial party was not drinking, but appeared to be preaching to his guests; the face of the woman who sat beside him wore a charming pout—or, to be strictly accurate, she pouted in the intervals when she was not yawning.

"Why, hang it all!" said the Regent, who was short-sighted, peering at the woman who was facing him, "It seems to me I know that face." He screwed up his eyes and peered more intently. Dubois was chuckling to himself silently.

"See," continued the Regent, "a brunette with blue eyes—"

"A blue-eyed brunette," rejoined Dubois. "Yes; go on, Monseigneur."

"A charming figure—small hands—"

"Go on, go on!"

"A little pink chin—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Why, devil take me! It's the Mouse, or I'm very much mistaken."

"You don't mean it!"

"You ineffable scoundrel! Damme if you haven't chosen the Mouse on purpose!"

"One of the most delightful young ladies with whom I am acquainted, Monseigneur—in the opera, as you know—and it seemed to me that I could hardly find a lady better fitted to complete the education of a backward young man."

"Then this was the 'surprise' you were holding in reserve, was it? when you said that he was drinking his father's wines and making love to his father's—"

"His father's *protégée*; yes, Monseigneur, that was my little surprise."

"Monstrous!" ejaculated the Duke, trying his hardest to look scandalized."

"Rubbish!" said Dubois.

"And the little wretch accepts invitations of this kind, does she?"

"Why, of course."

"And with whom does she suppose she is supping?"

"With a young gentleman from the provinces, come up to Paris to squander his inheritance."

"And who is her companion-in-crime?"

"Oh! as to the other, I know absolutely nothing. The Chevalier undertook to find the other lady."

At that moment, the girl seated beside the Chevalier de M—, fancying she heard a whisper behind her, turned her head. — "Why!" exclaimed Dubois, startled in his turn, "surely I can't be mistaken!"

"What is it—what is it?"

"The other woman!"

"Well? The other woman—?" asked the Duke.

The young woman again turned her pretty head towards them.

"It's *Julie*!" cried Dubois. "The minx!"

"Ecod! that's simply superb!" said the Duke, delighted at his minister's discomfiture. "Oh! I'd give the world to be able to laugh!"

"Just wait a moment, Monseigneur, I'll—"

"Nonsense! are you crazy? What the devil are you at, Dubois? Keep still, I tell you. I am curious to see how it will finish."

"As you please, Monseigneur; but let me tell you one thing."

"Well?"

"From this moment I cease to believe in the virtue of women."

The Regent rolled back upon the curtain and grew purple in the face with suppressed mirth. "Dubois," he wheezed at length, "you are perfectly delightful, upon my soul! If I'm not allowed to laugh, I shall burst!"

"Let us laugh, then, by all means, but quietly. You are right; we must see the finish of this," said Dubois. Both laughed heartily, but as noiselessly as possible; then having to some extent regained control over themselves, they once more advanced their heads to the

opening. The young woman who had been dignified by the name of the Mouse was yawning in an utter abandonment of bedroom.

"If you notice, Monseigneur," whispered Dubois, "Monsieur Louis doesn't appear to be in the least pleased or excited."

"True. You would say he had not drunk a drop."

"But see all those empty bottles down there. You cannot suppose they *walked* there."

"Still, he looks sober as a judge, the rascal!"

"Wait—he'll soon become lively. Listen, he's going to speak."

The young Duke rose from his chair, pushing aside the bottle which the Mouse offered him. "I had a desire to witness," he began sententiously, "what is called an orgy. Now I have seen one, and have learned all I wished to know. In the words of the philosopher, *Ebrietas omne vitium deliquit*."

"What is he saying?" whispered the Duke.

"Matters are going badly," said Dubois.

"What!" cried the young Duke's fair neighbour, displaying her beautiful teeth in a bewitching smile. "What! you don't care to stay to supper?"

"I do not care to eat and drink," replied Louis, "when I am neither hungry nor thirsty."

"The milksop!" interjected the Regent. He looked at Dubois, who was biting his lips with disappointment."

The Chevalier laughed and said, "Excepting, of course, in the society of these charming ladies?"

"What do you mean by that, Monseigneur?"

"Ha!" cried the Regent, "he's getting angry. Good!"

"Good!" echoed Dubois.

"I mean to say, sir," replied the Chevalier, "that you cannot be so discourteous towards these ladies as to show, by withdrawing, that you do not appreciate their society."

"It is growing late, sir."

"Pooh! It is not yet twelve o'clock," replied the Chevalier.

"And besides," continued Louis, searching for an excuse, "and besides . . . I have to keep an appointment."

The two girls burst into a peal of laughter.

"Lord! what a *stick!*" muttered the Abbé.

"*What!*" exclaimed the Regent.

"Ah! true, I was forgetting. Pardon me, Monseigneur."

"My dear fellow," said the Chevalier, "you are painfully rustic."

"Eh!" said the Duke, fuming. "A devilish nice thing to say to a Prince of the Blood!"

"He is supposed not to be aware of his companion's quality, and to believe him a simple gentleman. Besides, I told him to apply the spur pretty sharply."

"Forgive me, sir," said the young Prince politely, "you were speaking, were you not? This lady was speaking to me at the same time, and I didn't catch what you said."

"Do you wish me to repeat it?" asked the young man, with an insolent laugh.

"If you will, I shall be pleased."

"I remarked, sir," said the other, speaking with great deliberation, "that you were painfully rustic."

"A flattering distinction, sir, since it implies that I am unlike certain Parisians of my acquaintance," replied Louis.

"Come, that's not a bad retort," said the Duke. Dubois permitted himself a contemptuous grunt.

"If that observation is to my address, you will permit me to tell you, sir, that you are discourteous—a trifle, certainly, so far as regards myself only, since I can hold you answerable for your rudeness, but quite unpardonable in the presence of these ladies."

"Your man is going to unnecessary lengths," said the Regent uneasily. "They'll be cutting each other's throats in a moment."

"Well, we shall prevent 'em," replied Dubois.

The young Prince, quite unmoved, walked quietly to the other side of the table, and bending down to his companion's ear, spoke to him in a low tone.—"You see!" exclaimed the Regent excitedly. "Be careful, Abbé; I can't have the lad killed!"

"Now, sir, on your conscience," Louis was saying, "can you tell me that you are enjoying yourself here? For my part, I declare I am bored to extinction. Were we undisturbed by these ladies, I would wish to consult your opinion upon a

rather important question which occupies me at this moment; I refer to the sixth chapter of St. Augustine's *Confessions*."

"*What!*" cried the Chevalier, opening his eyes in genuine amazement, you are interested in *theology*? At your age, it is rather—"

"It can never be unseasonable, sir," replied Louis with portentous solemnity, "to devote one's mind to the salvation of the soul."

The Regent gave vent to a deep sigh of disappointment; Dubois was grimacing hideously.

"'Pon my word as a gentleman!" cried the Prince, "it is a slur on the blood. Why! the women are falling asleep."

"Wait a bit," put in Dubois, "perhaps, if they do fall asleep, he'll find some more courage."

"Perhaps all the same, you will favour me with your opinion," continued Louis. "According to St. Jerome, grace, to be effective, can only be obtained by repentance, but—"

"To the devil with you!" shouted the Chevalier. "If you had been drinking at all, I should say you were maudlin drunk."

"Now it is my turn," replied the young Prince, "to observe that *you* are impolite; and I might answer you in the same tone that you have chosen to adopt, only that we are commanded to forgive those who injure us. But I thank Heaven I am a better Christian than you."

"When a man is supping in company," rejoined the Chevalier, "it is not a question of being a good Christian, but a good companion. You are a veritable wet blanket! I'd prefer supping with St. Augustine himself—even after he was converted!"

The young Duke rang the bell and a footman appeared.—"Light this gentleman to the door," he said in a tone of authority. "I myself shall stay a quarter of an hour longer. Have you your carriage, Chevalier?"

"Faith, no!"

"In that case, pray make use of mine," replied Louis. It grieves me that I am unable to cultivate your acquaintance, but, as I have said, our tastes are different; besides, I have to return to the *provinces*."

"Ecod!" whispered the Abbé, "I wonder if he is dismissing the Chevalier in order to amuse himself alone with the women."

"It would be rather neat, certainly," said the Duke, "but I don't think that's his idea."

Whilst the Abbé and the Regent were exchanging observations, the Chevalier had retired, and Louis of Orleans, left with the two young women, who by this time had really fallen asleep, had extracted from his coat-pocket a large roll of paper, and from his vest-pocket a red pencil. He sat down and, surrounded by still steaming dishes and half-empty bottles, began to make copious notes on the margin with all the zeal of a hair-splitting theologian.

"If this young Prince should be a cause of suspicion to the elder branch it would be a grave injustice," said the Regent. "Can anybody assert after this that I bring up my children in the expectation of a throne?"

"Monseigneur, I declare it makes me ill," said Dubois.

"Ah! Dubois, my younger daughter a Jansenist, her sister turned philosopher, and my only son a bigot; I am bedevilled, Dubois! On my word of honour, if I didn't hold myself in check I should have all such people burned!"

"Take care, Monseigneur, if you have them burned people will say you are continuing the traditions of the Grand Monarque and La Maintenon."

"And a good thing too! But, look you, Dubois, this young jackanapes who has begun compiling tomes so early,—lamme! it's enough to drive a man crazy!—you'll see when I'm dead and gone he'll have my pictures of Daphnis and Chloe burned by the common hangman."

For ten minutes longer Louis d'Orléans continued his annotations; having finished, he carefully replaced the precious manuscript in his coat-pocket, poured out a glass of water in which he moistened a crust of bread, and, after saying a long grace, ate his meagre supper with great apparent relish.

"The boy is an anchorite!" muttered the Regent in despair. "I ask you, Dubois, who the devil can have taught him such tricks?"

"It was not I, Monseigneur, I assure you."

At length the Prince rose, and again rang the bell. "Has the carriage returned?" he asked the servant.

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Very well, I will go. As to these

ladies, you see they are asleep; when they wake you will hold yourself at their orders."

The man bowed, and the Prince walked from the room with a dignified step, like an archbishop bestowing a blessing.

"What the deuce did you mean by bringing me here to witness such a spectacle?" cried the Regent desperately.

"Happy father—thrice happy father that you are! your children are all saints by instinct, and yet there are people who speak ill of your family! By my cardinal's hat, I only wish that the Princes of the direct line were present!"

"Well, I would show 'em how the father makes reparation for the shortcomings of the son," said the Regent. "Come, Dubois."

"What do you mean, Monseigneur?"

"Devil seize me if the contagion hasn't reached you now!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you, you simpleton!" cried the Regent, in much exasperation. "What! you see a supper-table already spread—bottles uncorked—two sleeping women to be roused—and you ask what I mean! Dubois, I'm hungry. I'm thirsty, Dubois. We'll go and take the affair over just as that young ass has left it. Now do you understand?"

"Faith, that's an idea!" said Dubois, rubbing his hands. "You, Monseigneur, are the only man who can always be depended upon to rise to the height of his reputation."

As the Duke had said, the two young women were still sleeping. Quitting their hiding-place, the Regent and his companion entered the dining-room and took the seats vacated by the Prince and the Chevalier de M—. The Regent opened a fresh bottle of champagne, the popping of the cork causing the two slumberers to awaken.

"Ah! so you have changed your mind and decided to be convivial, have you?" murmured the young woman whom the Duke had named 'Mousie,' as she stretched herself sleepily.

"And you have decided to wake up?" retorted the Duke. On hearing the Regent's voice, the young woman jumped as though she had received an electric shock. She rubbed her eyes to convince herself that she was really awake, and half rose from her seat; then, recognizing the Regent, she sank back in her chair.

calling upon her companion, Julie by name. As for Julie, she appeared as though she were fascinated by Dubois' face as he sat regarding her with a mocking leer.

"Come, wake up, Mousie!" the Duke said. "I see you are still the good little soul you always were to give me the preference. I told Dubois to ask you to supper; you have any number of engagements, I know, and you put them all off to come and have supper with me."

The other young woman, Julie, had received a greater fright than her friend. Her eyes wandered from one to the other, and she coloured and looked sheepish.

"Why, what's the matter, Julie?" asked Dubois. "Is it possible that his Highness has made a mistake, and you came here to meet some other people?"

"I can't tell you that," replied Mademoiselle Julie.

The Mousie began to laugh—"If Monseigneur invited us, he knows all about it and has no need to ask. On the other hand, if he did *not*, I don't consider the Abbé's question a fair one, and I decline to answer it."

"There! didn't I tell you, Abbé?" cried the Duke, shaking with laughter. "Didn't I say she had a pretty wit of her own?"

Dubois filled the glasses of his fair companions and raised his own glass to his lips. "And didn't I tell you, Monseigneur, that the wine would be first rate?"

"Try this champagne, Mousie, and tell me if you know it," said the Regent.

"I'm rather afraid, Monseigneur," said the young lady from the Opera, "it is the same thing with wine as with gallants—"

"I understand—you can't overburden your memory. 'Pon my word, Mousie, you are not only the dearest girl I know, but the most truthful. You are no hypocrite, at any rate," added the Duke with a sigh.

"Oh! if you take it like that, Monseigneur—"

"Well, what are you going to say?"

"I may as well put a few questions to you."

"Go on, then; I am ready to answer."

"Can you expound dreams, your Highness?"

"Oh, I'm something of a wizard."

"Then perhaps you can tell me the meaning of mine?"

"Better than anybody, Mousie. Besides, if I'm pulled up short in my explanation, here's the Abbé, who receives a couple of millions a year to pay the cost of discovering the dreams, good or bad, of everybody in this kingdom."

"Well?"

"Well, if I break down, the Abbé will come to the rescue. So let us hear your dream."

"You know, Monseigneur, that when we grew tired of waiting for you, Julie and I fell asleep."

"Yes, I know; you were both sound asleep when we arrived."

"Not merely asleep, Monseigneur, but dreaming."

"Really!"

"Yes. I can't answer for Julie, of course,—she may or may not have been. Speaking for myself I thought I saw—"

"Keep your ears open, Dubois. I fancy it will be interesting."

"Where Monsieur l'Abbé is sitting, I thought I saw an officer—I don't know or care who he was—he was Julie's friend, I think."

"You hear, Mademoiselle?" said Dubois. "A grave accusation is being brought against you." Julie, who had been nicknamed the "Rat," lacked the strength of mind of her companion, whom she usually accompanied in her adventures. Instead of replying, she hung her head and looked embarrassed.

"And did you see anybody where I am sitting?" asked the Duke.

"That's exactly what I was about to tell you," said the Mouse. "Where your Highness is sitting, I saw—still in my dream, of course—"

"Of course," said the Duke. "That is understood."

"A handsome young gentleman of about fifteen or sixteen, but the remarkable thing is, you would have said a young lady, only it spoke Latin."

"Ah! my poor little Mousie, what is this you are telling me?"

"Yes; and after about an hour's theological discussion—highly edifying dissertations upon St. Jerome and St. Augustine—profound appreciations of Jansenius—faith! Monseigneur, it seemed to me—always in my dream—that I fell asleep."

"So then at that moment," said the Duke, "you dreamed that you were dreaming?"

"Yes, the whole business seemed so complicated and I am so anxious to have it all explained—it was no use asking Julie—that I address myself to you, Monseigneur, whom I know to possess the gift of divination. I know it, because you said so."

"Mousie," said the Duke, filling her glass afresh, "taste this wine seriously. I believe you have done your palate an injustice."

"Indeed," said the young woman after she had drained the glass, "this champagne reminds me of a certain brand I have only tasted at—"

"At the Palais-Royal?"

"That's it! yes, of course."

"Well, if you have only had this wine at the Palais-Royal, it is equivalent to saying it was not to be found anywhere else, is it not? You have knocked about the world enough to be able to give my cellar that testimonial."

"Oh! I will do your cellar that justice very willingly."

"Then if this wine is only to be found at the Palais-Royal, it is I who had it sent here."

"You, Monseigneur?"

"I—or Dubois, at least. You know, I suppose, that Dubois has the key of my cellar as well as that of my purse?"

"The key of the cellar very likely," said Mademoiselle Julie, who had recovered self-possession to hazard an interruption. "But as for the key of your purse, one would scarcely suspect it."

"You hear that, Dubois?" cried the Regent.

"Your Highness may have noticed," replied the Abbé, "that the child does not often open her mouth; but when she does her words are golden as St. Chrysostom's."

"To continue. If I had this wine sent here, it can only have been for the use of Duc d'Orléans."

"Why, are there two of them?" asked the Mouse.

"Most certainly!" replied the Regent.

"Father and son, eh? Philippe d'Orléans, Louis d'Orléans."

"You've hit it, Mousie, you've hit it!"

"What!" cried the dancing-girl, frowning herself back in her chair and shrieking with laughter, "what! that young man—that theologian—that Jan-
enist—"

"Oh! that'll do!"

"The little man I saw in my dream?"

"Yes."

"There, where you are sitting?"

"In this very chair."

"Is Monseigneur Louis d'Orléans?"

"His very self."

"Ah! Monseigneur, your son scarcely takes after his father, and I'm very glad I'm not dreaming now."

"I'm not," said Julie, uncompromisingly.

"There! what did I tell your Highness!" cried Dubois. "Julie, my child," he continued, "you are worth your weight in gold!"

"So you still love me as much as ever, do you, Mousie?"

"I confess I am very fond of you, Monseigneur."

"In spite of your dreams?"

"Yes, Monseigneur—or perhaps because of them."

"Hardly flattering for me if your last dream is a fair example."

"Oh! pray don't imagine I suffer from nightmare *every* night, Monseigneur." This reply confirmed his Highness in the opinion he had previously expressed, namely, that the fascinating Mouse was by no means devoid of intelligence. Under these happy auspices the convivial party set themselves to attack the hitherto neglected supper, and with such gusto and determination that it was three o'clock in the morning before they could decide to separate. The Regent accommodated the fair Mouse with his son's carriage, and afterwards drove home to the Palais-Royal, whilst Dubois appropriated that of his Highness in order to escort to her dwelling his interesting young friend Julie.

Before retiring to his well-earned rest, the Regent, who had only after many struggles overcome the melancholy he had been fighting against all the evening, sat down and wrote a letter; then ringing for his valet,—“See that this letter is despatched this very morning by a special messenger,” he said, “and let him deliver it only to the person to whom it is addressed.”

The envelope was superscribed: “To MADAME URSULE, Superior of the Ursu lines, at Clisson.”

CHAPTER IV

WHAT HAPPENED THREE NIGHTS LATER A HUNDRED LEAGUES AWAY FROM THE PALAIS ROYAL

THREE nights after the evening upon which the Regent sustained the three successive disappointments we have mentioned, certain events took place in the neighbourhood of Nantes, of which, for the right understanding of this story, it would be improper to omit the smallest detail. We shall therefore take leave to transport our readers, in virtue of our story-teller's privilege, to the locality indicated.

Two or three leagues from Nantes upon the road to Clisson, within a short distance of the convent celebrated as the residence of the famous scholar Abelard, stood a long, dingy building surrounded by trees—those short, bushy trees with sombre foliage which are to be found throughout Brittany. Dense, impenetrable hedges everywhere obstructed the view—along the roads, outside the walls and round the enclosure—the line of hedge only interrupted by a tall gate with a barred opening surmounted by a large wooden cross. This gate was the only entrance to the enclosure. Such was the aspect which the exterior of this carefully guarded house presented; moreover the single gateway we have mentioned gave access only to a garden, at the far end of which was a wall pierced in its turn by a narrow doorway of massive construction perpetually closed. From a distance the building had the repellent and gloomy appearance of a prison. It was, however, a convent peopled by Augustinian nuns, subject to a rule by no means over severe for the provinces, but, compared with the customs of Versailles or Paris, a rule which was rigidity itself.

The house, as we have said, was inaccessible on three sides; but the fourth, which was the side farthest from the road—from which, indeed, nothing could be seen save the roof, owing to the walls and hedges—the fourth side of the convent rose straight from a broad sheet of water which washed the foundations of the wall. Ten feet above the rippling surface of the lake the wall was pierced by the windows of the refectory.

This little lake, in common with the other approaches to the convent, ap-

peared to be carefully guarded; it was surrounded by high wooden palings which, towards the opposite shore, were hidden from sight behind tall bulrushes overhanging a thick growth of water lilies with their pure white blossoms and broad leaves resting upon the bosom of the water. Amidst the rushes flights of birds, especially starlings, would sweep cover towards night, filling the air with their joyous twittering until the sun had quite gone down. Then, with the first shades of night their voices would cease, and the calm of evening would sink upon all around. A thin vapour would gather upon the surface of the mere and rise like a white phantom in the obscurity, the stillness being troubled only at intervals by the prolonged croak of a frog or the lugubrious hooting of an owl.

The extremity of the lake, where it was joined by a little rivulet, was shut off by a guard of iron bars, imbedded in the banks and penetrating into the bed of the stream, rendering it impossible for anyone swimming along its course to slip beneath the screen into the lake beyond. In summer, a boat was usually to be found fastened to the bars and drawn up upon the bank amidst the bindweed and bluebells hiding with their verdant foliage the rust which the dampness of the spot had caused to accumulate upon the iron. This boat belonged to the gardener, who occasionally made use of it in order to reach those parts of the lake where the fish were most plentiful. There he would drop his line or sweep-net, and incidentally relieve the tedium of the poor recluses immured in the convent with the amusement of watching the sport.

Sometimes however during the summer, but only upon the darkest nights the iron guard was mysteriously unlocked, and a man enveloped in a cloak would step silently into the boat, which appeared to detach itself of its own accord from the bar to which it had been made fast. Then, gliding over the water without sound or visible motion of an oar, the boat, as though impelled by an imperceptible breeze, would reach the convent wall exactly beneath one of the barred windows of the refectory.

The stranger would imitate the croaking of a frog or the cry of a screech-owl by way of signal; and soon a young girl would appear at the window, the bars of which were far enough apart to allow her

pretty head, crowned with long, fair curls, to pass between them. The window was too high above the lake, however, for the young man in the cloak even to reach her hand, in spite of his repeated efforts. He had perforce to content himself with a halting conversation, his shy and tender speeches only reaching the ears of the girl in snatches, being half swallowed up in the sighing of the wind and the murmur of the waters. After an hour spent in this manner he would begin to say farewell—a process which occupied fully another hour before it could be completed. At length, when the young lovers had fixed the night of their next meeting and arranged a different signal, the boat would be pushed off and return to the spot whence it had come; the iron grating would be refastened as quietly as it had been opened, and the young man would depart, throwing a last kiss towards the window which the girl, sighing, was about to close.

But at the time of which we are now speaking it was no longer summer. As we have already mentioned, we are at the beginning of the month of February during the terrible winter of 1719. The turdy old trees are white and glistening with rime; the bulrushes are forsaken by their joyous tenants, who have departed, come to seek a more temperate climate, others in search of a shelter less exposed to the wintry blasts. The irises and water-lilies lie stiffly upon the frozen and glassy surface of the mere, all covered with a thin layer of snow. As for the dark building of the convent, it wears a more gloomy aspect than ever, enveloped as it is in its white mantle, which covers it like a shroud, from its roof, sparkling with hoar-frost, down to the staircase before the entrance, its outlines blurred under the deep snow. Impossible to cross the lake by boat now that the water is bound in the icy grip of the frost.

Nevertheless, in spite of the dense lackness of the night—in spite of the piercing cold and the dark sky where not a star was glimmering—a solitary horseman, quite unattended, passed out from the main gateway of Nantes in the direction of the open country. He struck off from the high road from Nantes to Clisson into a bye-path which quitted the main road a hundred yards or so beyond the walls. Having

reached it, he dropped his reins upon the neck of his mount, a superb thoroughbred which, instead of starting forward with the careless pace of an animal less carefully trained, was intelligent enough to moderate his pace to a trot, planting its hoofs firmly and with precision upon the road, in appearance smooth as a table, but in reality, deeply rutted and strewn with big stones, all treacherously covered up by the snow.

For a time all went well. The sharp north wind, not violent enough to hinder the cavalier's advance, blew out the folds of his cloak; on either side of the way gigantic black skeletons of trees slipped past like phantoms, whilst the faint reflected glimmer from the snow afforded just sufficient light to enable him to keep to the road. Soon, however, in spite of its instinctive precautions, the poor beast tripped against a stone and almost fell; it recovered itself instantly, but the rider, aroused from a brown study by the mishap, perceived that his horse was going lame. This at first caused the cavalier little disquietude. He continued to ride on; but before long the limp became more pronounced, and the young man, thinking that a splinter of flint might have remained stuck in the animal's hoof, dismounted and examined the injury as well as he was able in the darkness. He found to his great annoyance that the horse had not only cast a shoe, but that the hoof was bleeding—the latter discovery being rendered positive by a trail of blood faintly discernible upon the snow. Evidently his horse was badly hurt. The young man was casting about in his mind for a plan to adopt in face of this accident when he fancied he caught the sound, muffled though it was by the snow, of approaching hoofs. He listened intently for a moment in order to assure himself he had not been mistaken. Then no doubt convinced of the fact that several horsemen were making in the same direction as he had followed, and reflecting that in the possible event of their being in pursuit of him he must certainly be overtaken, he made his decision accordingly. Springing into the saddle, he rode his horse ten paces off the road, pulled up behind a pile of felled trees, slipped his naked sword under his arm, drew a pistol from the holster and waited.

The horsemen rapidly drew near, and in spite of the darkness their black cloaks

and the white horse which one of them was riding were distinguishable. There were four of them, and they advanced without a word; on his side, the young cavalier held his breath, and the horse, as though understanding his master's danger, remained equally silent and motionless.

The cavalcade, having heard nothing to arrest their attention, advanced along the road until they had passed the pile of logs behind which was concealed the young cavalier, who began to think he had succeeded in shaking off these unwelcome travellers, whoever they might be. All at once the four horsemen pulled up; the one who had appeared to be the leader dismounted, produced a dark lantern from the folds of his cloak, turned the slide and directed the light towards the roadway which he examined with attention. Finding that the tracks they had been following were no longer to be seen, the horsemen concluded that they had advanced too far. They turned back; and noticing the spot where the cavalier had left the road, the man who held the lantern turned a shaft of light towards the pile of trees and instantly caught sight of a man on horseback still and silent as though carved in stone. Almost simultaneously came the sharp click of pistols being cocked.

"Halloa!" said the cavalier with the wounded horse, "Who are you, gentlemen? And what do you want?"

"Yes, it is he," said one.—"You see, I was right," said another of the pursuers. The man with the lantern made a step towards the solitary horseman who had been the object of their search.

"Another step, and you are a dead man!" said the cavalier. "Give me your name instantly, for I must know whom I am dealing with."

"Don't shoot, Monsieur de Chanlay," replied the man with the lantern. "If you'll take my advice, you will put your pistols back in your holsters."

"Ah! the Marquis de Pontcalec—so it is you?" rejoined he who had been addressed by the name of De Chanlay.

"Yes, sir, it is I."

"And pray, why are you here?"

"To demand an explanation from you with regard to your conduct, sir. Come forward, then, if you please, and let us hear what you have to say."

"You have a singular manner of in-

venting my confidence, Marquis. Perhaps, if you wish me to answer, you will recognize the propriety of couching your request in a more polite form."

"Come forward, Gaston," said another of the four; "we really have something of importance to ask you, my dear fellow."

"That is better," said De Chanlay, "there I recognize your native courtesy, Montlouis. I admit I am not accustomed to being addressed in the tone Monsieur de Pontcalec has seen fit to adopt."

"I speak frankly without weighing my words, like an honest Breton gentleman who has nothing to hide from his friends," retorted the Marquis. "And my friends have full liberty to question me in the same manner as I question others."

"For my part I agree with Montlouis," said another voice, "and I am quite at one with him in begging Gaston to discuss this small matter as among friends. It is of prime importance, it seems to me, that there should be no bickering between ourselves."

"Thank you, Du Couëdic," said the cavalier; "I am entirely of your opinion, and that being the case, I'll come forward and do my best to satisfy you." With these conciliatory words the young man, replacing his pistol in the holster and sheathing his sword, approached the group standing in the road awaiting the upshot of the parley.

"M. de Talhouët," said the Marquis in the tone of a man who had acquired, or has been accorded, the right to command "you will keep guard and allow no one to approach without warning us."

De Talhouët, in obedience to the order began riding his horse in a large circle round the group, keeping both eyes and ears open.

"Now," said the Marquis, as he remounted, "let us put out the lantern since we have found our man."

"Gentlemen," began the Chevalier de Chanlay, "you will permit me to say that all this seems to me rather extraordinary. It appears that you have been following me—you were in search of me, you say,—and having found me, you can put out your lantern. Pray be good enough to tell me the meaning of it. If it is a joke, I confess I find it in poor taste."

"No, sir, it is not a joke," replied the Marquis curtly, "it is an 'interrogatory.'"

"Indeed!" said De Chanlay, frowning.

"Better say an explanation," said Montlouis.

"It matters little," rejoined Pontcalec. "The business is too grave to quibble about words. Interrogatory or explanation, as you please, but you will answer our questions, Monsieur de Chanlay."

"You adopt a harsh tone of command, Marquis," replied Gaston.

"If I command, it is because I have the right. Am I your chief, or am I not?"

"Certainly you are; but that is no reason why you should forget the consideration which one gentleman owes to another."

"De Chanlay, these objections of yours have very much the appearance of shuffling. You are sworn to obedience—obey me now."

"I swore obedience," replied De Chanlay, "but not as a menial."

"You swore to obey like a slave. Obey then, or take the consequences of your disobedience."

"Marquis——!"

"My dear Gaston," said Montlouis, "speak out, I beg—and as quickly as possible. By a word you can clear up all suspicion."

"Suspicion!" cried Gaston, shaking with anger. "You dare to suspect me, then?"

"Of course we suspect you," said Pontcalec, bluntly. "Do you suppose we followed you in such weather as this for mere amusement?"

"That alters the case, Marquis," said Gaston coldly. "State your suspicions—I will listen."

"Remember the facts, Chevalier: we four were conspiring together; we did not ask your support, but you offered it of your own accord. You told us that besides being willing to help us for the general good, you had a private quarrel to avenge. Is this not the fact?"

"It is."

"We received you among us—welcomed you as a friend, as a brother—we shared with you all our hopes and plans. Still more—it was you who were chosen by lot to strike the most important, the most glorious blow. Each one of us offered to take your place, but you would not give way. Is it not so?"

"All you have said is the strict truth, Marquis."

"We drew lots this very morning, and to-night you should be upon your way to Paris. Instead of that, where do we find you? On the road to Clisson—a hotbed of the most implacable enemies of Breton independence, where the Maréchal de Montesquieu lives, our sworn foe."

"Well, Monsieur?" said Gaston scornfully.

"Do not sneer, sir, but meet my questions frankly. I command you to give me a reply."

"Answer him, Gaston, answer him!" added Couëdic and Montlouis in a tone of entreaty.

"And what am I to answer him about?"

"You will explain," said De Couëdic, persuasively, "your frequent absence during the last two months and the mystery which surrounds you. You will tell us your reason for refusing once or twice every week to be present at our nightly meetings. For we must confess frankly, Gaston, that all this mystery has rendered us uneasy. Well, well; a single word and you can set our minds at rest."

"It is evident sir, that you know yourself to be guilty, since you choose to hide yourself instead of continuing your journey," the Marquis interposed.

"I stopped because my horse was injured; you can see for yourself that there is blood upon the snow."

"But why conceal yourself?"

"Because I wished to know first of all who was following me. Have I not equal cause to fear arrest as well as yourselves?"

"Then where were you going?"

"If you had continued to follow my tracks you would have discovered that I was not going to Clisson at all."

"Nor to Paris either?"

"Gentlemen, I ask you to give me your confidence and to respect my secret—a secret which touches not only my own honour, but that of another. Perhaps you may not realise how deeply I feel in a matter of this kind."

"Ah! then it is a love-affair?" asked Montlouis.

"Yes—a first love-affair," replied Gaston simply.

"All this is pure evasion!" cried Pontcalec.

"Marquis!" cried Gaston, stung to the quick.

"You do not tell us enough, my friend," said Du Couëdic. "How are we to believe you are keeping a tryst in such weather as this? How are we to suppose you are not going to Clisson, when we all know there is not a single house of any size, excepting only the Augustinian Convent, within a couple of leagues?"

"M. de Chanlay," said the Marquis, in the tone of a man who is dealing with a matter of the gravest import, "you took the oath to obey me as your chief and to devote yourself body and soul to the sacred cause. It is a very serious business, sir, we are engaged in. Not only do we risk all we possess, but our lives and liberty—our very honour—are at stake. I ask you to reply clearly and definitely to the questions I am about to put to you in the name of all—I ask you to clear up the suspicion to which your conduct has given rise. If you refuse, Monsieur de Chanlay, I shall have no alternative but to exercise the right which you have given me voluntarily—the right of life and death—and, upon the word of a gentleman, I will blow out your brains."

A grim silence followed—not a voice was raised in Gaston's defence. He looked at each of his friends in turn, and each avoided his glance.

"Marquis," said the young man at length, in a voice of manly resolution, but with a note of deep feeling, "not only do you insult me by suspecting me, but you cut me to the heart by declaring that I can only remove your suspicions by betraying my secret. Stay," he added, drawing a pocket-book from his coat and rapidly pencilling a few words on a leaf which he tore out; "stay, here is the secret you wish to know—I hold it in one hand, and with the other I take a loaded pistol. Will you make reparation for the insult you have put upon me? If not, I give you my word as a gentleman that I will shoot myself through the head. When I am dead you can open my hand and read this note. You will then see if I deserved to be so cruelly suspected." With these words Gaston raised the pistol to his forehead with a quiet but determined air which left no doubt but he intended to keep his word.

"Hold! Gaston—hold your hand, in Heaven's name!" cried Montlouis, whilst Du Couëdic seized the young man's arm.—"He will do as he has said, Marquis—

pardon him, then, and he will tell you all. It is true, Gaston, is it not?—you would not refuse your comrades when they entreat you in the names of their wives and children to disclose your secret!"

"Indeed and indeed!" cried the Marquis, "I pardon him—nay, more, I love the lad, as he knows right well. Only let him prove his innocence and I will hasten to make him every reparation within my power. But until then I can unsay nothing. He is young—he is alone in the world. But we—we have to safeguard the rights of our wives and children, whose welfare he has put in peril. He risks his own life merely, and that he holds as cheaply as any young man of twenty. He should not forget though that our lives also depend upon his discretion. Well, well; let him say but a single word in justification—let him but give a likely reason—and I shall be the first to ask his pardon for having entertained a doubt."

For a few moments Gaston maintained silence, then he said, "So be it, then, Marquis; follow me, and you shall see the reason of my journey to-night."

"And we?" asked Montlouis and Du Couëdic.

"Come also, by all means. Each of you is a gentleman, and my secret is as safe with four as with one."

The Marquis called to Talhouët who had been keeping guard. He now rejoined the others and followed the group without inquiring what had passed. The five men went forward at a slow pace, for Gaston's horse was still limping badly. The Chevalier led them towards the convent of which we have already spoken. Half-an-hour later they reached the brook; within a few paces of the iron guard which spanned it Gaston came to a halt.

"It is here," he said.

"Here?—At the Augustinian Convent?"

"Yes, gentlemen. Within this convent lives a young girl whom I have loved since I first saw her, a year ago, in the procession at the *Fête-Dieu* at Nantes. She observed me also; I followed her and found an opportunity of sending her a letter."

"But how do you contrive to see her?" asked the Marquis.

"I won over the gardener by a present of a hundred louis and obtained from

him a key of this water-gate. In summer time I can cross over to the convent wall in a boat, and she awaits me at a window ten feet above the surface of the water. Were it not so dark, you could see the window from here—I can see it as it is."

"Yes, I understand how you manage in summer," replied the Marquis. "But you can't use a boat now."

"True; but I have no need of one to-night, since the lake is covered with ice. Perhaps, though, it may break and drown me—so much the better, for then you would no longer fear my betraying you."

"You have taken a load from my breast," said Montlouis. "Ah! my dear Gaston, how happy you have made me, for you will remember both Du Couëdic and I answered for your integrity."

"Forgive us for having doubted you, and embrace me, Gaston, in token of your forgiveness!" cried the Marquis.

"Right willingly, Marquis. But you have to some extent damped the happiness to which I looked forward."

"In what way?"

"Ah! my love seemed to me too sweet and sacred to be spoken of to others—even to you, my trusted friends and comrades. And I needed all its glamour to nerve my heart for the separation, for we part to-night, never perhaps to meet again."

"Who knows, Chevalier? I think you take too gloomy a view of the future."

"I know what I am saying, Montlouis."

"Should you succeed—and with your cool courage and resolution you are bound to succeed, Gaston,—France will be free. She will owe her liberty to you, and the future will be in your own hands."

"Ah, Marquis, if I succeed it will be for others; my own fate is unalterably fixed."

"Have courage and confidence, Chevalier! Meanwhile, let us see how you conduct your love-affairs."

"You still mistrust me, then, Marquis?"

"Why, yes, my dear Gaston; and I even mistrust myself—though that is natural enough since you have all honoured me by naming me your chief, for upon me rests all the responsibility, and I have to guard you even from yourselves."

"See then, Marquis, I am quite as anxious to arrive at the foot of yonder wall as you can be to witness it, so that you will not have long to wait."

Gaston hitched his horse to the branch of a tree; then with the assistance of a plank thrown across the brook to form a bridge, he succeeded in opening the water-gate, and having followed the palings for some distance in order to avoid the spot where the running stream prevented the ice from forming, he stepped boldly upon the frozen surface of the lake, which cracked audibly beneath his weight.

"For Heaven's sake take heed, Gaston!" cried Montlouis, careful, however, not to raise his voice unduly.

"'Tis as God wills," replied Gaston. "Do you see, Marquis?"

"I believe you, Gaston, I believe you!"

"You give me fresh courage," replied the Chevalier.

"One word more, Gaston: when do you leave?"

"By this time to-morrow, Marquis, I shall, in all probability, be twenty-five or thirty leagues on my way to Paris."

"Come back, then, and let us embrace and say farewell."

"With all the pleasure in life."

The Chevalier de Chanlay retraced his steps and was cordially embraced by each of the four gentlemen. They did not leave the spot until they had assured themselves of his safe passage across the treacherous ice, holding themselves ready to go to his aid in case of accident.

CHAPTER V

HOW CHANCE WILL SOMETIMES ARRANGE MATTERS IN A FASHION TO PUT PROVIDENCE TO THE BLUSH

HEEDLESS of the cracking ice, Gaston hurried across the lake. He noticed with a thrill of joy that the level of the water, owing to the heavy winter rains, had risen so far as to afford him the hope that he would find himself able to reach to the window from the foot of the wall.

He was not mistaken. Having arrived

beneath the window, he put his hands to his mouth and imitated the cry of a screech-owl; the window was opened, and, as though to requite him for the dangers he had run, the pretty head of his sweetheart appeared almost at the level of his own. He seized the hand extended to him, which he now clasped for the first time, and covered it with kisses.

"Ah, Gaston, you have come then, in spite of the cold—and there is no boat—you have crossed on the ice. You know in my letter I forbade you to attempt it—the ice is scarcely set."

"With your letter next my heart I cannot believe it a danger. But what is this sad news you say you have to tell me? Dear, you have been crying!"

"Indeed, I have done nothing but cry ever since this morning."

"Since this morning?" said Gaston, smiling sadly. "Why, that is strange; for were I not a man I could e'en have wept myself."

"You, Gaston? Why——"

"Tis nothing, dear. But let me hear what grieves you, *Hélène*. Come, tell me all."

"Alas! you know I cannot do as I will. I am but a poor orphan, brought up here, and knowing no other refuge in the whole world but this convent. I have never known either mother or father—my mother, I think, is dead, and they tell me always my father is absent. Someone whom I know not—of whom our Mother Superior alone knows—holds my fate at his disposal. This morning the good Mother sent for me and told me with tears in her eyes that I was to quit the convent."

"You are leaving the convent, *Hélène*?"

"Yes; my family have claimed me, Gaston."

"Your family—good Heavens! what new misfortune have we to suffer?"

"Yes, Gaston, it is a misfortune, though at first our good Mother congratulated me, thinking I should be pleased. But I was so happy here—I prayed for nothing but to be permitted to stay here until we could wed. It is ordained otherwise. What will become of me now I know not."

"And the order which commands you leave——?"

"Will admit of neither discussion nor delay, Gaston. It seems that I belong to

a powerful family—that I am the daughter of some great nobleman. When the good Mother told me I must go, I burst into tears—I threw myself at her feet and begged that I might be allowed to stay with her always. Then she suspected that I had another motive; she questioned me, she insisted and . . . forgive me, Gaston, I needed someone in whom I could confide—someone to give me kind words and consolation. I told her all—how we love one another—everything except the manner in which we contrive to meet. I was afraid to tell her that—I feared lest she might forbid me to see you again even for this last time to bid you farewell."

"But you told her what we had planned, did you not, *Hélène*? That I am bound to further the ends of a certain league for six months—perhaps a year—but after that, the first day that I am free, my name and fortune—all that I have—are yours."

"I did, Gaston; and it was that led me to think I am the daughter of someone high in rank, for Mother Ursula replied, 'My daughter, you must forget him. Who knows if your family would consent to your marrying him?'"

"But is not my family one of the oldest in Brittany? And though scarcely rich, am I not of independent fortune? Did you tell her this, *Hélène*?"

"Oh, I only said, 'Gaston found me an orphan without name or portion. They may part us, dear Mother Ursula, but were I to forget him it would be cruel and base, and I will never, never forget him.'"

"Sweetheart, you are an angel! But have you no inkling as to who your relations are or what they intend with regard to you?"

"I only know that it is a profound secret—a secret upon which they tell me all my future happiness depends. But I fear—I fear they must be of high station, Gaston, as I told you; for it seemed to me—perhaps I was wrong—that our Superior herself spoke to me—I hardly know how to express it—almost in a tone of deference."

"Why! so much the better!" cried Gaston, but he sighed in spite of his apparent cheerfulness.

"Can you say that, Gaston!" said *Hélène*, reproachfully. "Can you rejoice that we are to be parted?"

"Nay, dear; but I am glad to think that you have found your relations just when you are about to lose . . ."

"Whom, Gaston? There is none who loves me but you—can you mean that I am about to lose you?"

"At the best, I am forced to leave you for a while, dearest."

"What are you saying?"

"Only that Fate has determined that our lots shall be similar, and that I also know not what the morrow may have in store for me."

"Gaston, Gaston, your tone is sad—tell me what you mean by those words."

"I mean, dear, that I also am in the hands of Destiny—I also must submit to an inscrutable power whose ends I cannot foresee."

"You, Gaston? Oh! you frighten me!"

"A power which perhaps may condemn me to leave you in a week—in a fortnight—in a month,—to leave you, and perhaps to quit France."

"Oh! Gaston—Why? Why?"

"I dared not tell you this before because I loved you—because I must selfishly remain in my fool's paradise—and I had not the courage to think of this hour of parting. This morning my eyes were opened. I am come to tell you that I must leave you, *Hélène*."

"But why? What are you about to do? What will become of you?"

"Alas! I may not tell you. We each have our secret, *Hélène*," said the Chevalier sadly, "and I pray Heaven that yours be not as terrible as my own."

"Gaston!"

"Were you not the first to say that we must part, *Hélène*? You found the courage to renounce me—ah! then, I bless you for that courage, for it will strengthen my own. Dear, I was not brave enough to bear the thought of parting." With these words the young man passionately pressed his lips upon the hand which all this time had remained clasped in his own, and, in spite of his efforts to master his emotion, *Hélène* became aware that he was weeping.

"Oh Heaven!" she murmured, "in what way have we offended that we should be forced to suffer thus?"

Hearing this exclamation, Gaston raised his head. "Let us have courage," he said, as though speaking to himself. "It is useless to struggle against the

inevitable—let us therefore bow to necessity and bear our lot without repining. Perhaps by resignation we shall conquer Fate. Could I see you again before you leave?"

"I hardly think it possible, for I leave to-morrow."

"Which road do you take?"

"The Paris road."

"Eh! Then you are going to—?"

"To Paris."

"Good heavens!" cried Gaston. "Why, I am going there too."

"You!"

"Yes, I! Ah! we were wrong, *Hélène*, after all; we need not part."

"Oh! Gaston—is it really true?"

"True?—It is true we did wrong in railing at Providence; and Providence retorts with coals of fire by granting us more than we had dared to ask. Not only can we travel together, but we can contrive to see one another in Paris. How do you go?"

"In the convent chaise, travelling post, but only in short stages, lest I should be fatigued."

"Who will accompany you?"

"One of the sisters. She will return to the convent as soon as she has seen me safely handed over to those who are expecting me."

"Then all's for the best, *Hélène*. I go on horseback—you will appear not to know me—and every evening I shall be able to get word with you. Even if we are unable to speak, I shall at least have you in sight, *Hélène*, and we shall not feel entirely separated."

Thus our pair of lovers, thanks to their youth with its unquenchable hope and confidence in the future, were enabled to part gaily, after having approached the meeting with mutual gloom and apprehension. Gaston recrossed the frozen mere with the same good fortune which had attended his previous venture. He approached the tree to which he had fastened his horse; but in place of the injured animal he had left, he found the horse which Montlouis had ridden. Profiting by his friend's thoughtful attention, he returned to Nantes in less than three quarters of an hour, without any further mishap.

CHAPTER VI

THE JOURNEY

GASTON spent the rest of the night in making his will, and deposited it next morning with a notary at Nantes. He left everything he possessed to Hélène de Chaverny, and begged her in case of his death not to renounce the world for his sake, but to occupy the place which her youth and beauty fitted her to adorn. As the last of his race, he desired her only, in memory of him, to name her first-born son Gaston.

Afterwards the Chevalier paid a final visit to all his friends, wishing especially to take leave of Montlouis, with whom he was more closely acquainted than with the other three, and to whom he owed thanks for the help he had afforded him the night before. To each of them he expressed his confidence that the enterprise would be brought to a successful issue. Pontcalec broke a gold piece and gave one half to the Chevalier together with a letter, both of which he was to deliver to a certain Captain La Jonquière who acted as agent in Paris and corresponded regularly with the conspirators. The said Captain La Jonquière was to put Gaston in communication with certain important personages in the capital, upon whom he was instructed to call. The Chevalier then placed in a valise all the ready money he was able to collect, and, accompanied only by his servant, named Owen, who had been with him for the last three years and was considered to be thoroughly trustworthy, he set out from Nantes, and took the road to Paris. The four friends had deemed it wiser that he should not be seen in their company, lest suspicion might be aroused, and each therefore took leave of him privately.

It was high noon. The road was in good condition; a bright wintry sun dazzlingly lit up the snow-clad fields; icicles hanging from the bare branches of trees sparkled like crystal. Nevertheless the long road was almost deserted—nowhere could Gaston catch sight of anything in the least resembling the well-known green-and-black chaise which the good Sisters were accustomed to use when a pupil was to be brought to the convent or to be re-conveyed to her family.

Followed by his servant, Gaston rode on. His countenance was expressive of

mixed emotions—joy aroused by the gay and smiling aspect of nature, and grief at the thought that soon these beauties, by a swift and fatal stroke of destiny, might be lost to him for ever. Arrangements had been made, before he left Nantes, between Gaston and his friends for relays of horses as far as Le Mans; but a variety of reasons had induced the young man to countermand these orders. In the first place, the frost had rendered the roads so slippery as to prove an insurmountable obstacle to rapid travelling. Gaston, indeed, was not disposed to seek a remedy for this state of things even had it been possible to find one, for, as will be remembered, he was not desirous of getting forward too quickly. For the benefit of his servant, however, he assumed an appearance of great haste; but immediately after starting his horse at a good round pace, the animal twice slipped dangerously, and that of Owen sustained a fall. This accident provided the Chevalier with a convenient excuse for continuing the journey at a walk.

As for the servant, he had from the first appeared far more anxious than his master to cover ground. He belonged to that class of men who find nothing but tedium in travelling, and are therefore always in a hurry, and wish to shorten the route as much as possible in order the sooner to arrive at their journey's end. Besides, he had heard such glowing accounts of the capital that he had never visited that, in his impatience to reach the miraculous city of his fond imaginings, he would have attached wings to the horses had it been possible, despite the fact that he was but an indifferent horseman.

Gaston, as we have said, rode at a foot pace as far as Oudon; but however deliberate his progress, the chaise from the convent advanced more slowly still. Travelling post upon the high-roads in those days was about equivalent to the speed of the diligence of a century later, or perhaps not so fast. More especially was it the case when the chaise was occupied by ladies; but whoever the traveller, unless he were in a position to make free use of the lash—not only upon the horses, but also upon the postillions—he had but slight reason to hope for a speedy arrival at his journey's end.

The Chevalier de Chanlay drew rein at Oudon before the sign of the *Châ*

Couronné. The inn had two windows overlooking the road, and had the further advantage of being the principal hostelry of the town at which coaches were accustomed to put up. Gaston ordered dinner, for it was now two o'clock in the afternoon; and while it was being prepared he stationed himself on the balcony where, in spite of the cold, he remained, in order to keep a continual watch on the street. Despite the long extent of road visible from this point of observation, his keen glance could discern nothing but lumbering country waggons and coaches crammed with passengers. For any sign of the eagerly-expected green-and-black chaise, it might have been a hundred miles away. At length the impatient young man became almost convinced that *Hélène* had reached Oudon some time before his own arrival, and perhaps was even at that moment under the same roof. Full of this idea, he turned quickly from the front window and crossed over to the one at the back overlooking the yard, from whence he could conveniently pass under review the vehicles which stood in the coach-houses. The coach from the convent was not among them; nevertheless he stayed at the window for some moments; for he had seen his servant in the courtyard, holding an animated conversation with a man clothed in grey and wearing a long cloak of a military cut. This individual, having finished his talk with Owen, threw himself astride of a serviceable post-horse, clapped spurs into him and, heedless of the frozen and slippery pavement, rode off like a man whose motive for haste is too pressing to allow him to entertain a thought of so paltry a matter as the risk of a broken neck. As luck would have it, he neither fell nor even slipped; and Gaston was able to guess from the direction in which he heard the clatter of the horse's hoofs that he was taking the road to Paris.

Next moment, Gaston's servant looked up and saw his master's eyes fixed upon him; he changed colour, and like a man caught doing something he has no business to do, he pretended to be engaged in brushing his coat-sleeves and kicking the snow from his boots. Gaston called him to the window and he obeyed, though with evident reluctance.

"To whom were you speaking just now?" asked the Chevalier.

"To a man, Monsieur Gaston," replied the fellow with that air, half clownish, half cunning, which is so characteristic of the French peasantry.

"Ah!—well, who was the man?"

"A traveller—a soldier, who asked me the way, Monsieur."

"Asked you the way?—where to?"

"To Rennes."

"But how could you direct him, since you have never been here before?"

"I went and asked the landlord, Monsieur Gaston."

"Why could he not ask himself?"

"Because he'd just had a wrangle with him about his bill, and didn't want to have any more to say to him."

The explanation seemed a natural one, but Gaston was not entirely satisfied. He reflected upon the matter as he turned and re-entered his room. The fellow had always served him faithfully; still it was a fact that he was a nephew of a confidential valet in the service of M. de Montaran, until latterly Governor of Brittany, but who, in consequence of having aroused the hostility of the whole province, had been superseded by M. de Montesquieu. It was from this uncle of his that Owen had heard the marvellous accounts of Paris, which had fired him with longing to see the capital—a desire which, in all probability, was now about to be gratified.

Upon further reflection, however, Gaston decided that he had no reasonable grounds for doubting his servant's fidelity. He began to ask himself if, under the dominating influence of a fixed idea, he were not becoming nervously timorous; at a time, too, when it was above all things necessary to keep a stout heart. Still, the cloud which had settled upon his countenance at the sight of Owen in conversation with the man in grey was not entirely dispelled. The non-appearance of the green-and-black chaise was in itself sufficient to account for his uneasiness.

For a moment the thought entered his mind—for even the most generous-minded of men at times harbour unworthy ideas—that *Hélène*, wishing to break with him, had chosen to travel by another road in order to avoid a meeting. Better thoughts prevailed: he remembered that in travelling accidents which cause delay are of frequent occurrence. He sat down again to table, though he had long before

the servant, having nothing to do, should be looking out of the windows. Gaston frowned, and turning to the gardener, "Do you know this fellow?" he asked.

"You mean your man Owen?" said the gardener, surprised at the question. "Know him indeed! I should think I do—why, we come from the same village."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Oh! yes, he's a decent lad, is Owen," the gardener went on.

"Well, not a word to him of *Mademoiselle Hélène*," said the Chevalier.

The gardener gave the required promise—the more readily since it was to his interest that his relations with the Chevalier should not become known. He knew that if it were discovered how Gaston obtained the key, he, the obliging lender of it, would be instantly discharged; and the post of gardener to an Augustinian Convent was a valuable one to a man who knew how to make the most of it.

Gaston returned to the common room where he found Owen awaiting him. It was necessary to dislodge the fellow, and in order to get rid of him he directed him to saddle the horses. The gardener had meanwhile been stirring up the postillions and fresh horses had already been harnessed to the carriage, which was now ready to resume the journey. They were only waiting for the two ladies who, after a slight repast—for it was a fast day—re-crossed the dining-room a moment later. In the doorway they encountered Gaston, hat in hand, ready to assist them into their carriage. Such attentions on the part of gentlemen towards young ladies were then customary, and besides, the Chevalier de Chanlay was not altogether unknown even to Sister Thérèse. She therefore accepted the attention without over-acting the part of dragon; indeed, she went so far as to give him a gracious smile by way of thanks. Naturally, after handing Sister Thérèse into the carriage, Gaston was entitled to perform the same courtesy towards Hélène, and this, the reader will have guessed, was the object of his manœuvre.

"The horses are ready, sir," said Owen, making his appearance at the door.

"Very well," replied Gaston. "One more glass and I will start."

He bowed to the ladies and re-entered the inn; then, to Owen's utter astonishment, he called for another bottle, for the

second had disappeared in the same manner as the first. Indeed, of the three bottles, Gaston scarcely drank two glasses. He sat down, and remained for a quarter of an hour; then having no reason for a longer stay at Oudon, for he was now in as great a hurry as his man to continue the journey, he mounted and rode away.

The two horsemen had hardly gone a mile when Gaston suddenly caught sight of the green-and-black chaise round a bend in the road, scarcely fifty paces ahead. It had stuck fast in a deep rut, having broken through the ice which covered it, and in spite of the united strength of the gardener's exertions and of the postillion's language,—in spite also of the severe punishment administered to the horses—the vehicle remained fixed.

This accident was a veritable godsend for Gaston. Impossible to abandon two women in distress, especially when the gardener, recognizing his old neighbour Owen, appealed to him for help. The two horsemen accordingly dismounted—and, as the good Sister Thérèse appeared greatly alarmed, the carriage door was opened and the two ladies stepped into the road. Then, thanks to the fresh accession of muscle, the chaise was promptly hoisted out of the rut; the ladies resumed their places and the carriage drove on.

Thus owing its inception to a service rendered, an acquaintanceship was formed under conditions most favourable for the Chevalier. The night grew dark, and Sister Thérèse ventured to inquire timidly if M. le Chevalier considered the roads safe. The poor recluse, who never went outside her convent walls, had persuaded herself that the roads were infested with highwaymen. Gaston was careful not to convince her to the contrary. He assured her, however, that as he and his servant were travelling in the same direction they would escort the carriage as far as Anenis, where the ladies intended to pass the night. The good Sister regarded this offer as a most distinguished courtesy on the part of the Chevalier, and accepted it readily, her fears now entirely set at rest. Meanwhile Hélène had played her part in this little comedy to perfection; for every woman, young or old, however ingenuous she may appear, is by nature prone to dissimulation, and is ready to exercise her powers when occasion presents itself.

The road was narrow, the ground uneven and slippery; and as it was now quite dark, Gaston judged it his duty to ride close beside the carriage, thus giving Sister Thérèse an opportunity of addressing several questions to him. She learned that the young man was the Chevalier de Livry, the brother of a young lady who had been one of the most popular of the convent boarders and had become the wife of Montlouis. This story was corroborated by the gardener. Thanks to these qualifications, Gaston earned the Sister's entire confidence, and she no longer felt the slightest scruple in accepting his escort—nor was Héléne in the least inclined to suggest one.

As previously arranged, they stopped at Ancenis. With his usual politeness, Gaston assisted the two ladies from the carriage, completely winning Sister Thérèse by his charming manners. Therefore she was much gratified when, as she was about to start next morning, she saw the Chevalier and his servant in the courtyard of the inn, already in the saddle. Of course Gaston at once dismounted and offered the ladies the accustomed civilities. Whilst Héléne was being handed into the carriage she felt her lover slip a little note into her hand; she gave him a glance which signified that he should receive a reply that very evening.

The condition of the road was even worse than on the previous day; thereby the Chevalier's attendance became indispensable. Gaston rode continually beside the carriage; frequently a wheel became fixed in a rut and required to be dragged out by main strength; or on encountering a steep hill, the ladies were obliged to leave the vehicle; on such occasions poor Sister Thérèse could scarce find words to express her gratitude. "My dear child," she kept saying to Héléne, "I tremble to think what would have become of us without this kind gentleman's assistance."

That evening, before reaching Angers, Gaston enquired at what inn the ladies purposed staying. Sister Thérèse consulted her tablets, upon which had been written in advance the names of the various hostleries chosen for them, and replied that they would put up at the *Herse d'Or*. By a singular coincidence, it appeared that the Chevalier had decided upon the same inn; accordingly he sent his servant on in front to engage rooms.

When they arrived, Gaston received

the reply which Héléne had written at dinner and now handed to him as she left the carriage. Alas! the lovers had already forgotten all they had said to each other that night when they met at the convent window; they spoke of their love as everlasting, of their happiness as though no thought of parting had crossed their minds. Nevertheless, Gaston at least could not delude himself; he read Héléne's note with deep sadness, for he looked upon the future in its true light—that is to say, with despair. For the conspiracy in which he was engaged, and the fearful errand which led him to Paris made him regard his present happiness only as a momentary respite from misfortune—from the impending calamity ever present in the background of his thoughts. Yet there were moments when he forgot everything—when, for instance, the two lovers exchanged a tender glance as Héléne leaned upon his arm while ascending a hill, or whispered words fraught with the assurance of undying love—at such moments the poor Chevalier's heart was filled with sweet rapture, and it seemed to him that Héléne smiled with the pure affection of an angel in Paradise. The young girl continually found occasion to show her charming head at the window in order to admire the view of mountain or valley, but Gaston knew full well that it was he alone whom she wished to see, and that, however charming the scenery, it would scarcely have awakened the tender love-light which he saw in her eyes when they met his own.

The acquaintanceship had by this time so far ripened that Gaston was entitled to remain continually beside the carriage; and of this privilege he availed himself amply, for he knew that these moments of happiness were the last he would be permitted to enjoy in this life. A tide of bitter revolt surged in his heart—he rebelled against the hard destiny which decreed that whilst he tasted the cup of joy for the first time, it was to be dashed from his lips. In his pain Gaston forgot that he had voluntarily thrown himself into the conspiracy which now enmeshed him, forcing him to follow the fatal path which could only lead to exile or the scaffold. He could not but contrast with this grim prospect the smiling by-path lying invitingly near at hand, leading straight to the goal of all earthly felicity.

True, Gaston had joined the conspiracy

before he knew H  l  ne, when he believed himself alone in the world. In his youthful folly he had persuaded himself at twenty-two years of age that earth held no joys in store for him, and that he had no share in the common lot of mankind. Then he had met H  l  ne, and from that moment he had regarded the world as it really is, that is to say, filled with possibilities of happiness for those who have the ability to grasp it. Now it was too late. Gaston had entered upon a course from which there could be no turning back; he must pursue it to the appointed end,—an end which, successful or not, must at least prove fatal to himself. Thus the poor Chevalier, his feelings highly-strung by the crisis through which he was passing, and his senses rendered acute by the sense of impending loss, took count of every word or smile, of every pressure of the hand; not a movement of H  l  ne nor a change of expression escaped him.

Meanwhile, it may easily be guessed that Gaston had entirely forgotten the suspicions which had crossed his mind with regard to Owen—suspicions in part due to the ill-humour of the moment, now dispersed like a flight of evil night-birds before the glorious dawn. Consequently, Gaston had failed to notice that on the road from Oudon to Le Mans Owen had been in conversation with two horsemen of similar appearance to the man who had ridden away in such haste from the inn where they had first stopped. These two men also, like the first, had subsequently ridden off in the direction of Paris.

For his part, Owen, not being in love like his master, had missed nothing of what had passed between Gaston and H  l  ne.

As the day of parting approached, Gaston's gloom intensified; he no longer counted the days, but the hours. The journey had already lasted a week and, however slowly they travelled, must soon end. Already the landlady of the inn at Chartres had replied indifferently in answer to a question from Sister Th  r  se, "You could reach Rambouillet to-morrow evening if you were to hurry your pace a little." To Gaston it was as though she had said, "To-morrow you will be parted for ever." H  l  ne noticed the profound impression made upon Gaston by these words; the blood left his cheeks, and she enquired anxiously if he

were ill; but Gaston's smile reassured her although he said no word.

Still, at the bottom of her heart, H  l  ne was assailed with doubts. The poor child was in love, and, like all women when they love deeply, was ready to dare all and to sacrifice all to the passion which engrossed her. She was at a loss to understand why Gaston, being a man, could devise no means of defying the harsh fate which decreed their separation. For, notwithstanding the rigid banishment from the convent of those insidious works, so dear to the heart of youth, called romances, she had contrived to read some old volumes of *Cl  lie* and the *Grand Cyrus*, disguised as works of devotion. From such romances she had learned how in days gone by gallant cavaliers and noble ladies had contrived to overcome similar obstacles and to thwart opposition by seeking some pious hermit who united them in the woods before a rough wooden cross or stone altar. Often, in order to snatch his lady-love from the custody of her dastardly persecutors, the knight had found it necessary to corrupt her guards—to effect a breach in a wall—to cleave in twain some wicked enchanter or malicious genie; arduous undertakings, it is true, but yet always happily and gloriously accomplished to the great renown of the bold lover.

But in the present circumstances, no such deeds of derring-do were called for. H  l  ne's only custodian was the poor sister. No walls needed to be thrown down, no magician or giant to be shorn in twain, unless it were the gardener, and he did not appear very formidable. Indeed, when one remembered the story of the key to the water-gate, it seemed reasonable to suppose that the gardener was already won over to the Chevalier's interests. Therefore H  l  ne could not understand the passive submission to the decrees of Providence. She could not but admit to herself that she would have preferred to see her lover making an effort to change the course of destiny.

H  l  ne was unconsciously doing Gaston an injustice: similar thoughts had passed through his mind, and, it must be confessed, had tormented him cruelly. He felt assured by a subtle sympathy that he had but to say a word and the girl would be ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. He was well supplied with money; some night, instead of retiring

to her room, H  l  ne could come to him; they would enter a real post-chaise with real horses. When one is prepared to pay handsomely it is always easy to travel quickly: in two days they would be across the frontier, and then, beyond the reach of pursuit, they would be free and happy, not for a year, but for the rest of their lives.

A flattering prospect; but one word—one little word—stood in the way. A mere assemblage of letters—to some men almost devoid of meaning, but to others of supreme significance—the word “honour.” Gaston had pledged his word to the four—men of honour like himself, Pontcalec, Montlouis, Du Cou  dic and Talhou  t—and he must keep his word or earn their contempt. The Chevalier was resolved to endure every calamity, but to keep faith; but though he achieved this victory over himself, his heart was wrenched with pain in the process.

H  l  ne had convinced herself that Gaston would adopt some plan that very evening, or at least that he would make some sign, since it was the last opportunity he would have. But to her great surprise Gaston said no word; and the poor girl retired to her room with tears in her eyes and with a heavy heart, for she felt that Gaston did not love her as she loved him. She was wrong, for that night Gaston never closed his eyes, and daylight found him paler and more despairing than ever.

Next morning they left Chartres and took the road to Rambouillet, where H  l  ne’s journey was to end. At Chartres, Owen had again been speaking to one of those horsemen dressed in grey who seemed to have been posted like sentinels along the route. The nearer they approached to the capital he longed to see, the more light-hearted did Owen become; and he did his utmost to persuade the postillion to ride faster. They halted for breakfast at a village: the meal was eaten in silence. Sister Th  r  se was thinking that next morning she would be returning to her beloved convent; H  l  ne reflected that if Gaston had at last made up his mind, it was now too late to act; Gaston was thinking that he must part, that very evening, from the girl he loved, in order to associate with men unknown to him, but to whose mysterious designs he was linked by his own fatal act.

In the course of the afternoon they arrived at the foot of a steep hill, and it became necessary to dismount. Gaston offered his arm to H  l  ne, whilst the Augustinian took the gardener’s, and they began the ascent. The two lovers walked side by side, their hearts overcharged with emotion. H  l  ne uttered no sound, but tears welled from her eyes and overflowed her cheeks. Gaston’s breast seemed to be burdened with a heavy load, but his eyes were dry—not but that he could have wept, only his manhood forbade such an exhibition of weakness. They were some distance in front of the rest of the party when they reached the crest of the hill. There the view opened out suddenly to the horizon, and they saw in the distance a tall spire standing out against the sky, beneath which were grouped a number of houses like a flock of sheep around the shepherd. It was the town of Rambouillet: both guessed it instinctively, for they had not been warned of its nearness.

Gaston was the first to break the silence. “Yonder,” he said, indicating the distant town with his hand, “yonder lies your goal, and the spot where we must say farewell—it may be for ever. Oh! I entreat you, H  l  ne, bear me in remembrance, and whatever you may hear said of me, do not condemn me.”

“Gaston, you speak of nothing but calamity,” said H  l  ne. “My courage needs strengthening, but instead of helping me, you break my heart. Oh! have you nothing to say to me to afford a little hope? The present is dark, I know; but can we not look forward to better things? Is not the future in our own hands, and have we not therefore every reason to hope? We are young and strong in our mutual love; surely we can devise a means of overcoming the joyless destiny which threatens us. Oh, Gaston! I feel that I am strong, and if you will but say . . . Ah! no; I am speaking foolishly . . . I am in sore trouble and I need some consolation.”

“Dear, I know what you would say,” replied Gaston, shaking his head despondently. “You would have my promise—only a promise—that is all you wish, is it not? Ah! what misery—I cannot, I cannot promise! . . . You bid me hope—I dare not. Had I but a single year’s freedom, H  l  ne, I would devote it to you and count myself the

happiest of men. But I cannot count a single day—from the moment I quit you I lose you for ever. From to-morrow morning my life and my reputation are no longer in my own hands."

"Oh, wretched girl that I am!" cried Hélène, taking Gaston's words in their literal meaning. "You were deceiving me, then, when you said you loved me? You were pledged to another."

"Poor little girl!" said Gaston. "At least I can dispel your fears on that score: I have plighted my troth to no other."

"Then why, Gaston, may we not yet hope to be happy, if my newly-found relations can be persuaded to regard you as my affianced husband?"

"Hélène, Hélène, do you not see that your words cut me to the heart?"

"But at least—at least tell me why."

"Dear girl, there are duties which must be fulfilled — ties which cannot be broken."

"I recognise none!" cried the young girl. "I am promised wealth, a family and a name—well, one word, Gaston—say but one word, and for your sake I will abandon all. Then why will you not dare as much for my sake?"

Gaston's head drooped and he could make no reply. Next moment they were rejoined by Sister Thérèse. Night was falling, and the good Sister was unable to observe their faces, else their secret had inevitably been betrayed. The two ladies re-entered the carriage; Gaston and his servant mounted their horses, and the journey toward Rambouillet was resumed.

When they had arrived within a league of the town, the Augustinian called to Gaston, who approached more closely to the carriage. She told him that, in all probability, someone would come to meet Hélène, and that it would perhaps be inconvenient if they were to find her escorted by a strange cavalier. This possibility had already occurred to Gaston, but he had lacked courage to mention it. He advanced a step nearer. Hélène was waiting and hoping. For what did she hope and what did she expect? Poor girl, she could scarcely have said herself. She hoped, perhaps, that Gaston's grief had at last urged him to some desperate course; but she saw that it was not so—he bowed deeply, murmured a few commonplace words of thanks for having been permitted to

enjoy their society, and then turned as though to leave.

Hélène was no ordinary girl: beneath his thin mask of conventional propriety she guessed the deep despair in Gaston's heart. "Is it good-bye, or farewell for ever?" she asked courageously.

Shaken with emotion, Gaston turned a drawn face towards her. "Bear with me, and let it be good-bye," he replied almost in a whisper. Then he sprang upon his horse and rode away into the night.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE SIGN OF THE *Tigre-Royal* AT RAMBOUILLET

GASTON had gone away without a word as to his future plans or as to how they were to meet; but Hélène reflected that she had but to wait, since she might trust to him to find a means. She followed him with her eyes until he was swallowed up by the darkness.

Soon the carriage entered Rambouillet. The Augustinian drew a piece of paper from her heavily charged pocket and, by the light of a lantern held close to the carriage, read out the following address: *Madame Desroches, at the sign of the Tigre-Royal*. The postillion received directions accordingly, and ten minutes later the carriage pulled up before the inn in question.

A woman, who had been waiting in a room which was entered by a doorway opening beneath the arched gateway of the inn, ran out to meet the new arrivals, dropped them a respectful curtsey and assisted them to alight. She then led them along a dark passage, faintly illuminated by a smoky lantern carried by a serving-man who preceded them. The passage led into a wide hall, comfortably furnished, whence a door opened leading to the rooms occupied by Madame Desroches, who stood aside to allow Hélène and Sister Thérèse to pass in front. A minute later the two travellers were seated upon a comfortable settee in front of a cheerful fire.

The room in which they found themselves was large and handsome, and fur-

nished with taste in the rather oppressive style then in vogue, for the world had not yet been afflicted with the fantastic manner of decoration which has received the name *rococo*. The somewhat chilling splendour which had prevailed during the late King's reign was everywhere apparent; enormous mirrors in heavily gilded frames stood above the fireplace and on the wall opposite; a lustre with gilded pendants hung from the ceiling; and gilded lions upon the hearth served in place of a fender.

There were four doors: the one by which they had entered; a second leading to the dining-room where candles were lit, a fire burning and the table laid; the third opened into a well-appointed bedroom; the fourth door, which was locked, was rarely opened.

Hélène admired all this magnificence, but without astonishment. She observed the quietly respectful manner of the silent-footed domestics, so different to the cheery, bustling servants of the inns where she had stayed. As for Sister Thérèse, in view of the steaming dishes on the table, she was murmuring a long benediction, devoutly thankful that it was not a fast day. Madame Desroches who, having accompanied the travellers into the room, had left them for a little while, now re-appeared and handed a letter to the Augustinian. She opened it and read as follows:

'Sister Thérèse will suit her own convenience as to whether she will stay the night at Rambouillet or return at once to Clisson. She will transfer her charge to the care of Madame Desroches, who is honoured with the confidence of Hélène's parents; and she is desired to accept, as an offering from Hélène to the convent she will ever bear in affectionate remembrance, a sum of two hundred louis.'

In place of signature the letter bore a device which Sister Thérèse compared with the seal stamped upon a letter which she had brought from Clisson. Having convinced herself of their identity, "Well, my child," she said, "after supper I must leave you."

"So soon?" cried Hélène regretfully, for Sister Thérèse was now the only link remaining to connect her with the old life.

"Yes, my child. It is true that I am permitted, if I wish, to sleep here; but I will admit to you that I had rather leave this evening, for I long to be at

home once more in Brittany amongst my own people, where nothing is wanting to my happiness—unless it be your presence, my dear daughter."

Hélène threw herself weeping into the arms of the good Sister. She remembered her childish years spent so happily amongst companions who were devoted to her — more for her own sake than out of the respect due to the promptings of the Superior. In a flash she saw again the old yew hedges around the convent and the pleasant mere. Once more she heard the mellow chimes; the whole peaceful life which had seemed like a half-forgotten dream returned in a vivid flood of memory.

The good Augustinian, on her part was no less moved. Her tears flowed freely; and this unexpected incident had so completely taken away her appetite that she rose to take leave without any thought of the meal which stood ready. However, Madame Desroches reminded them that supper was waiting, and remarked to Sister Thérèse, who had declared her intention of travelling all night, that she would find every inn closed, and consequently would be unable to obtain anything to eat before next morning. Therefore she begged her to sit down to table, or at least to provide herself with the necessary refreshment for the journey. Convinced that the advice was sound, Sister Thérèse was at length persuaded to follow it. She begged Hélène to join her at supper, and the latter complied so far as to take a seat at table, although she could eat nothing. The good Sister hastily swallowed a few mouthfuls and drank half a glass of Spanish wine. She then rose and again embraced Hélène, who expressed a wish to accompany her as far as the carriage. This was respectfully opposed by Madame Desroches on the grounds that the inn was full of strangers, and that it would be improper for Hélène to quit the room lest she might be exposed to their inquisitive gaze. Hélène then asked to see the gardener who had served as escort. It appeared that the poor man had solicited the favour of being allowed to say adieu, but it need scarcely be said that his sentimental request had received scant attention. No sooner, however, had Madame Desroches heard Hélène ex-

press a wish in harmony with that of the gardener than she had him sent for in order that he might be permitted to see the young lady once more and, in all probability, for the last time.

Everybody has experienced at moments of crisis in their lives—and this was such a moment for Hélène—the feeling that the persons and the familiar surroundings from which one is about to be separated acquire a stronger hold upon the heart. Thus the gentle old nun and the humble gardener appeared to Hélène like very dear friends, at parting from whom she felt almost broken-hearted. More than once she called them back in order to charge the Sister with messages for her former companions, or to recommend to the gardener the care of her favourite flowers, thanking him also with kind glances for his invaluable assistance in the matter of the key to the water-gate.

Madame Desroches noticed that Hélène was searching, without result, in her pocket; for what little money the girl possessed was packed away at the bottom of her trunk. "Does Mademoiselle require anything?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Hélène. "I wished to make the gardener a small present for the sake of remembrance."

Madame Desroches gave Hélène twenty-five louis, and, without counting, she slipped them into the man's hand. At this unexpected generosity the fellow fairly burst into tears. But it was time that they should go; the door closed behind them; Hélène ran to the window, but the shutters were closed and she could not watch their departure. She listened, and a moment later she heard the rumbling of wheels; the sound gradually died away, and when it could no longer be heard, Hélène sank back into a chair. Madame Desroches persuaded her to return to the supper table, as she had hitherto eaten nothing. Hélène complied, not, however, because she had any appetite, but as a pretext for not retiring, for she was in hopes that Gaston would send her some message that very evening.

Hélène accordingly resumed her seat at the table and begged Madame Desroches to join her. But it was only after repeated urging that her new companion could be brought to consent. Even then, in spite of the girl's persuasions, she

would eat nothing; but satisfied herself with waiting upon her charge.

Supper ended, Madame Desroches showed Hélène to her bedroom and said to her, "Will you please ring, Mademoiselle, when you require your maid? For I must tell you that it is very likely you will receive a visitor this evening."

"A visit!" cried Hélène.

"Yes, Mademoiselle. From one of your relations."

"The one who is taking charge of me?"

"Who has watched over you since your infancy, Mademoiselle."

"Good heavens!" cried Hélène, much perturbed. "And you say he is coming to-night?"

"I feel sure of it, for he is very desirous of knowing you."

"Oh! I really begin to feel quite upset."

Madame Desroches supported the girl in her motherly arms. "Surely you are not frightened at the thought of meeting one who loves you?" she said, soothingly.

"I don't think I am afraid," said Hélène, "only it is the suddenness of the news. I had not thought it would be so soon—and you gave me no warning—it came rather as a shock."

"But I have not told you all," continued Madame Desroches. "He is forced to act in a manner which will seem to you very mysterious."

"Why is that?"

"I am not permitted to reply to that question, Mademoiselle."

"Gracious! What can all these precautions possibly signify with regard to a poor orphan like myself?"

"Believe me, they are very necessary."

"But tell me at least what these precautions are."

"In the first place, you are not to see his face, for he does not wish you to recognise him if by chance you should meet him later."

"Then he will be wearing a mask?"

"No, Mademoiselle; but all the lights will be extinguished."

"So that we shall be entirely in darkness?"

"Yes."

"But you will stay with me, will you not, Madame Desroches?"

"Mademoiselle, that is expressly forbidden."

"By whom?"

"By him whose visit you are to expect."

"And has he the right to require implicit obedience from you?"

"Not only absolute obedience, Mademoiselle, but the deepest respect."

"Then he must be of high rank?"

"He is one of the highest noblemen in France."

"And this nobleman is related to me?"

"A very near relation."

"For Heaven's sake, Madame, do not leave me in this uncertainty."

"I have had the honour to tell you, Mademoiselle, that there are certain questions to which I am expressly forbidden to reply." Madame Desroches moved away as though about to retire.

"Do you mean to leave me?" cried Hélène.

"While you make your toilet, Mademoiselle."

"But, Madame——"

With a ceremonious courtesy, Madame Desroches backed respectfully from the room and closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER VIII

A MOUNTED MESSENGER IN THE LIVERY
OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUC
D'ORLÉANS

WHILST the circumstances we have related were taking place in the principal suite of apartments at the *Tigre-Royal*, in another room of the same hotel a man was seated in front of a blazing fire shaking the snow off his long boots and, at the same time, unbuckling the straps of a large despatch box.

This man wore the hunting livery of the Orléans—the red coat with silver facings, buckskin breeches, top-boots and three-cornered hat trimmed with silver. He had a sharp eye, a long, pointed nose—somewhat empurpled towards the tip—an open and benevolent forehead, whose expression was, however, contradicted by the thin, tightly-compressed lips. The box was crammed with papers; he turned them out upon a table beside him and

searched among them carefully. The man had a peculiar habit of talking to himself, or rather, of jerking out strange phrases, plentifully interspersed with oaths and exclamations which seemed less to have reference to his remarks than to other thoughts which suddenly crossed his mind.

"Come, come," he muttered, "that's not so bad. M. de Montaran was right—here we have our Bretons in the very act. But what the devil can the man have meant by travelling such short stages? Left the eleventh of June, hey? Only reached here on the twenty-first—six o'clock in the evening. . . . H'm. . . . Seems a mystery here. No doubt that fellow whom Montaran spoke about will be able to clear it up. That fellow whom my people have been in communication with all along the route. Hulloo there, someone!"

At the same time the man in the red coat rang a little silver bell; a courier in grey—one of those we have already noticed on the road from Nantes—appeared at the door and saluted.

"Ah! it is you, Tapin," said the man in the red coat.

"Yes, Monseigneur, the business seemed important and so I wished to come personally."

"You have examined the men you stationed along the route?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; but they know nothing except with regard to the successive stages travelled by those whom they were set to watch. Indeed, that is all they were instructed to find out?"

"True. Now I intend trying if I can learn more particulars from the servant. What sort of a man is he?"

"A crafty clown—half Breton and half Norman. A very scurvy rascal."

"What is he doing at the present moment?"

"He is serving his master's supper."

"Who is lodged on the ground floor as I ordered?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"In a room without curtains?"

"Yes."

"And you have had a hole pierced in the shutter?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Good. Send the servant to me, and keep within call yourself."

The man in the red coat, with the nose to match, drew a valuable watch from

his pocket. "Half-past eight," he muttered. "Monseigneur has returned from Saint-Germain and is at this moment asking for Dubois. Finds Dubois is not there. Rubs his hands and makes ready to get into mischief. Rub your hands by all means, your Highness—amuse yourself as you please. You are safe enough in Paris—it is here the danger lies. Aha! we shall see if you will make bad jokes about my secret police this time. Ah! here's our man."

Owen was led into the room by M. Tapin. "This is the man you want," said he, and then withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Owen remained just inside the doorway, visibly scared. Dubois had buttoned himself up in a huge cloak which afforded a pleasing view of the top of his head. He eyed the man sourly. "Come here, my friend," he said at length.

Notwithstanding the cordiality of the invitation, Dubois' high-pitched voice and strident accent made Owen feel a strong desire to find himself a hundred leagues away from the man whose unpleasant stare had already so unnerved him.

"Well?" said Dubois, seeing the man remain motionless as a block of wood. "Don't you hear me speak, scoundrel?"

"Oh, yes, your Honour—yes, sir," Owen blurted out.

"Then why don't you obey?"

"I didn't know you were speaking to me, sir, when you said 'come here!'" said Owen, advancing a few paces towards the table.

"You have received fifty louis to tell me what you know," continued Dubois.

"Pardon me, sir," replied Owen, plucking up a little spirit when he found that the other seemed rather to advance a statement than to put a question, "you'll pardon me, but I haven't had 'em—they were only promised."

Dubois drew a handful of gold pieces from his pocket. He counted out fifty louis and placed them in a tottering pile upon the table. Owen looked at them with a glitter in his eyes of which one would have believed those calf-like organs incapable.

"Good!" thought the observant Dubois. "The man is covetous."

Indeed, Owen had always regarded those fifty livres as an alluring but unsubstantial hope; he had betrayed his master

even while he scarcely expected to receive the price, merely from irresistible cupidity; and now the myth was a reality—the promised gold stood there before his eyes.

"Can I take the money?" asked Owen, his hand itching to close upon the pile.

"Wait a moment," said Dubois, delighting to play upon the man's cupidity. Anyone but a peasant would have sought to hide so gross a passion. "Wait a moment—let us make a bargain. Here are the fifty louis promised you."

"I see 'em well enough," said Owen, licking his lips.

"You will answer my questions; and for each answer that appears to be of any importance I will add ten louis."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," replied the gratified Owen.

"But every time you give me a stupid answer," continued Dubois, "I take away ten."

Owen stared sullenly; he began to think the bargain was one-sided.

"Now, let us talk," said Dubois. "What place have you come from?"

"From Nantes, as straight as I could go."

"With whom?"

"With M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

Dubois evidently regarded these questions as merely preliminary, for the money remained untouched. "Now be careful," he said, stretching out his bony hand within reach of the pile.

"Yes, sir; I'll be very careful," replied Owen, breathlessly.

"Did your master travel in his own name?"

"When he started he did; but he changed his name afterwards."

"What name did he take?"

"He called himself M. de Livry."

Dubois added ten louis; but as he could not put them on top of the pile, already too high, he formed a second beside it. Owen chuckled gleefully. "Oh! don't be too happy," said Dubois. "We haven't finished yet. Now listen: is there a M. de Livry at Nantes?"

"No, sir; but there is a young lady of that name."

"And who is this young lady?"

"She married M. de Montlouis, an intimate friend of my master."

"Good!" said Dubois, adding another

ten louis. "And how did your master occupy himself at Nantes?"

"Like all these young bloods—hunting—fencing—going to balls."

Dubois took away ten louis. Owen felt a shiver run through him. "Stop a moment—stop!" he said. "My master did something else."

"Ah, he did? Well, and what was it?"

"He used to go out of nights, once or twice a week, leaving home at eight o'clock in the evening and usually not returning before three or four in the morning."

"Good!" said Dubois. "Where was it he went?"

"That I can't say," replied Owen.

Dubois retained the ten louis in his hand. "And after he left Nantes," he continued, "what has he been doing?"

"He passed through Oudon, Ancenis, Le Mans, Nogent and Chartres."

Dubois extended his hand and neatly removed between his skinny fingers another ten louis from the pile. Owen gave vent to a deep groan of anguish. "And did he not make some acquaintance on the journey," Dubois continued.

"With a young lady pupil from the Augustinian Convent at Clisson who was travelling in company with one of the Sisters whom she called Sister Thérèse."

"And what was the young lady's name?"

"Mademoiselle Hélène de Chaverny."

"Helen, you say? That sounds promising. No doubt this beauteous Helen is your master's mistress?"

"Lord! sir, I can't say anything about that," replied Owen with a wink. "You may guess he didn't tell me."

"A shrewd fellow this," remarked Dubois with an acid smile, the same time making another attack upon the pile and reducing it by ten. Owen broke into a cold sweat. Four such answers as the last and he would have betrayed his master to no purpose. "Are the ladies travelling with him to Paris?" continued Dubois.

"No, sir; they go no further than Rambouillet."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dubois.

The exclamation seemed to Owen to promise well. "And Sister Thérèse is already on her way back," he added.

"Come," said Dubois, "all this is of small importance; still, one must en-

courage a beginner." He added ten louis to the pile. "So that the young girl remains alone at Rambouillet?"

"Not at all," replied Owen.

"How is that?"

"A lady from Paris was waiting for her."

"A lady from Paris, you say?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her name?"

"I heard Sister Thérèse call her Madame Desroches."

"Madame Desroches!" cried Dubois, laying the foundation of another pile of louis.

"Yes, sir," replied Owen, beaming.

"You are quite sure?"

"Ecod! I should rather think so,—and what proves it is that she is a tall woman, thin and fallow."

Dubois added another ten louis. Owen regretted he had not allowed an interval between each adjective: he felt that he had robbed himself of twenty louis by his reckless precipitation.

"Tall, thin, fallow," repeated Dubois.

"Very good."

"About forty or forty-five," added Owen, making a pause this time.

"Excellent!" said Dubois, adding another ten.

"Wearing a silk gown with large flowers," continued Owen, anxious to turn everything to account.

"Very good, very good." Owen perceived that his questioner had learned sufficient about the lady, so he waited. "And you tell me your master made the young lady's acquaintance in course of travelling?" enquired Dubois.

"That is to say, sir, now I come to think of it, I believe this making her acquaintance was just a bit of play-acting."

"What's that you say?"

"I believe they knew each other before they started—stop a minute—I'm sure of it. It was for her that my master waited three hours at Oudon."

"Good again," said Dubois, augmenting the pile once more. "Come, I believe we shall make something of you after all."

"Is there nothing else you wish to know?" asked Owen, reaching for the money which now included a bonus of thirty livres. He wore an expression of anguished expectancy, like that of an inveterate gambler who, having thrown a

main at dice, is yet not free from the fear that his opponent may throw better still.

"Just one moment," said Dubois. "Is the girl pretty?"

"Pretty as a picture, sir," replied Owen.

"And no doubt they have arranged to meet in Paris, she and your master?"

"No, sir, contrariwise, I believe they have said good-bye for ever."

"Another piece of comedy, eh?"

"I think not, sir. M. de Chanlay was looking too glum when they parted."

"Then they won't see one another?"

"Oh, yes; just once more, and that will be the end of it, I think."

"Well, take your money. And remember, if you let out a single word, you will not survive it ten minutes."

Owen pounced upon his eighty louis, and in an instant they had vanished into the cavernous recesses of his breeches-pocket. "And now, sir," he said, "I suppose I may clear out."

"Clear out be hanged, you idiot! By no means. Henceforth you belong to me—have I not bought and paid for you? And in Paris you can be of some use to me."

"Then I will stay, sir, I give you my word," said Owen, sighing heavily.

At that moment the door opened and Tapin appeared, wearing an expression of intense vexation and anxiety.

"What's the matter now?" asked Dubois, instantly perceiving that something was wrong.

"A most urgent matter, Monseigneur—but send this man away."

"Return to your master," said Dubois, "and if he should happen to write to anybody, do not forget that I've a consuming curiosity to see what his handwriting is like. You understand?"

Greatly relieved to find himself at liberty for the time being, Owen gave an awkward scrape by way of marking the respect he did not feel, and went out.

"Well, M. Tapin, what is it now?"

"The fact is, Monseigneur, that, after the hunt at Saint-Germain, his Royal Highness, instead of returning to Paris, merely sent back his horses to the stables and then gave the order to start for Rambouillet."

"Rambouillet! The Regent coming to Rambouillet?"

"He will be here in half-an-hour, and he could have been here by now only that

providentially he felt hungry and went to the château for something to eat."

"And what is his object?"

"I am quite at a loss, Monseigneur—unless it be on account of that young girl who has just arrived in charge of a nun and is lodged in the best room of the hotel."

"You are right, Tapin—she is the attraction, I'm convinced. Madame Desroches—yes, of course. Were you aware that Madame Desroches is here too?"

"No, Monseigneur, I didn't know."

"And you are sure he is coming—you are quite certain you have not been deceived by a false report, my worthy Tapin?"

"Oh! Monseigneur, I put my man, L'Éveillé, on his Royal Highness's tracks; and if L'Éveillé says a thing, it's Gospel."

"Quite right," assented Dubois, who appeared to be thoroughly aware of the merits of the man who had received Tapin's commendation. "Quite right; and that being the case, there is no room for doubt."

"And more by token the poor lad had foundered his horse, which fell as he entered Rambouillet and was unable to rise."

"Thirty louis for the horse, then, and let the man make what he can out of it for himself." Tapin took the thirty louis. "My dear fellow," continued Dubois, "you know the position of that young woman's room, I suppose?"

"Perfectly."

"Describe it."

"One window looks out upon the back-yard of the hotel, and the other upon a deserted alley."

"Men in the yard, men in the alley—disguise 'em as grooms, stable-boys, anything you like—but only His Highness and myself must have access to that room, you understand. The life of his Royal Highness is at stake."

"Leave it to me, Monseigneur."

"By-the-way, have you seen our Breton gentleman?"

"I had a look at him as he was dismounting."

"Do your men know him?"

"They have all of them seen him on the road."

"Well, I commend him to your attention."

"Shall I arrest him?"

"A plague! You will take particular care *not* to arrest him, M. Tapin. You must give him his fling—let him run loose and enjoy himself so he'll be tempted to act. If he were to be arrested now you would get nothing out of him and the whole conspiracy would be nipped in the bud. What the devil! I can't have that. On the contrary, I want it to fructify."

"And bear fruit, Monseigneur?" asked the agent, who seemed to enjoy a certain amount of Dubois' confidence.

"The Archbishop's mitre, my clever Tapin," replied Dubois. "And now be off about your business and I'll attend to mine."

With that both quitted the room and hurried down the stairs. They separated at the door; M. Tapin hurrying through the town along the road to Paris, whilst Dubois crept along the wall in order to apply his lynx-eye to the hole in the shutter.

CHAPTER IX

WHICH SHOWS THE ADVANTAGE OF SEALING LETTERS

GASTON had just supped; for at his age, whether a man be in despair or in love, nature will always assert her rights. For at twenty-five years of age a man who neglects his meals is indeed in a bad way.

Gaston sat with his elbow resting on the table, deep in thought. His face was in the full light of the lamp, thus affording Dubois an excellent opportunity of gratifying his curiosity, an opportunity which he was not the man to miss. He was regarding Gaston through the hole in the shutter with cat-like intensity of gaze, his eye dilated and the ironic lines round his mouth accentuated by a cunning smile. Had anyone observed him at that moment he might have thought it was a demon from the nether pit lurking in the shadow in order to dog the footsteps of some doomed victim on the road to perdition.

Without removing his eye from the shutter, Dubois, according to habit, was

muttering his thoughts. "Young and handsome, black eyes and disdainful mouth—a true Breton. Not yet corrupted, like Cellamare's conspirators, by the melting glances of the ladies at court. He'll be all the more determined. The others only talked about kidnapping—dethroning—nonsense of that sort. But this fellow . . . the devil! And yet," continued Dubois, after a pause, "he has an open countenance—he seems no cunning schemer. Nothing of the Machiavelli about the corners of his mouth. Looks like a man to be trusted. Still, there's no room for doubt that he's made all his arrangements to surprise the Regent when he comes to visit the fair charmer from Clisson. . . . Let anyone tell me after this that all Bretons are blockheads!" After a further examination he resumed his soliloquy:—"Upon my word, though, I can't think it. I'm wrong somewhere. Quite incredible that a young man of that stamp could look so calm if he were intending to assassinate a man in a quarter of an hour's time—and this man no less a personage than the first Prince of the Blood! No: impossible. Such deadly coolness would be beyond nature. . . . And yet, and yet, what else can I think?" continued Dubois. "The Regent has seen fit to conceal this little love-affair of his—to conceal it from me, to whom he tells everything. Goes hunting at Saint-Germain. Announces publicly that he will return to sleep at the Palais-Royal. Then suddenly countermands the order and tells the coachman to drive him to Rambouillet—yes, Rambouillet, where the girl is waiting for him—under the charge of Madame Desroches. For whom else should she be waiting if not for the Regent? And this girl is the Chevalier's mistress.—But is she, though? . . . Well, we shall very soon see: here comes our friend Owen, who has been to hide away his eighty louis and is now bringing his master paper and ink. Good! he's going to write; and we shall find out something definite. And we shall also observe how far that rascal Owen is to be depended upon."

Dubois abandoned his point of observation and went away shivering, for, as we have already said, the night was bitterly cold. He stopped upon the staircase and waited; from where he was standing in the shadow, the door of Gaston's room

was in full view. A moment later the door opened and Owen appeared. Outside, he stood for a second turning the letter over in his hands. Then he appeared to make up his mind and ascended the stairs. "Good!" thought Dubois, "he has nibbled the forbidden fruit and now he is in my hands." Then, stopping Owen upon the stairs, "Well, give me the letter and wait here," he said.

"How did you know I was bringing you a letter?" asked Owen, greatly taken aback.

Dubois shrugged, took the letter and entered his room. There he examined the fastening. The Chevalier, being unprovided with wax or seal, had made use of the wax from a bottle and had stamped it with the device of a ring. Dubois carefully held the paper close to the flame of a candle and melted the wax.

Opening the letter, he read as follows: "DEAR HÉLÈNE,—Your courage has increased my own two-fold. Contrive to let me see you, and you shall learn what my plans are."

"So it appears," said Dubois, "that she does not know them yet. Come, matters are not so far forward as I had thought." He re-folded the letter, chose among the numerous rings upon his fingers—which very possibly he wore in view of such contingencies—one which resembled that of the Chevalier, and, having again melted the wax, he re-sealed the letter with the utmost neatness. Returning to the man waiting on the stairs, "Here is your master's letter," he said. "Deliver it faithfully and bring me the answer, and you shall have ten louis."

"The deuce!" thought Owen to himself. "Is this man a walking gold-mine?" and he went off on his errand with alacrity. Ten minutes later he returned with the reply. It was written upon pretty perfumed paper and secured by a seal which simply bore the initial H.

Dubois opened a box containing a sort of paste of which he took a little and kneaded it in his fingers in order to take an impression of the seal. While thus engaged he noticed that the letter was folded in such a manner as to permit the contents to be visible without breaking the seal. "Now this is what I call considerate," he said, squeezing the edges of the letter and making it gape. The note was in these terms:

"The person unknown who arranged

for me to be brought here intends meeting me here instead of waiting until I reach Paris, so impatient is he, it appears, to see me. I expect he will arrive to-night and will return to Paris immediately. Come to-morrow morning before nine o'clock, and I will let you know all that passed between us. You will then know better how we must arrange to act."

"This seems to render the matter clearer," muttered Dubois, still holding to his preconceived idea that Héléne was the Chevalier's accomplice. — "*Peste!* what a wicked little baggage! If this is a specimen of the way they bring 'em up among the Augustinians at Clisson, the Lady Superior is to be congratulated. Ho! ho! and his Highness too—fancies because she is only sixteen he has found a simpleton. Well, he'll be sorry he acted for himself—I never make such mistakes." Turning to Owen, he said, "Here's your letter and the ten louis. A pure windfall, you will observe."

Owen pouched his money and took the letter. The honest fellow could understand nothing of it, and he asked himself what further good fortune Paris itself could hold in store for him if such manna as this were to be picked up in the outer suburbs.

The hour of ten was striking with measured, unobtrusive strokes upon the great bell; and mingled with its sonorous tones could be heard the dull rumbling of a carriage arriving at speed. Dubois went to the window and saw a vehicle pull up at the door of the hotel. A handsomely dressed individual got languidly out of the carriage with an assumption of aristocratic boredom, and was instantly recognized by Dubois as Captain Lafare, of his Royal Highness's Guards.

"I am pleased to notice," remarked Dubois, "that his Highness shows more prudence than I had credited him with. But what's become of him? — Ah!" The exclamation was caused by the sight of a man dressed in the same hunting livery as he himself was wearing beneath the long cloak in which he was enveloped. The huntsman arrived behind the carriage upon a superb Spanish jennet, which evidently he had mounted only a few minutes previously, for whereas the carriage horses were covered with lather in spite of the sharp frost, the huntsman's mount was scarcely breathed.

The carriage had hardly stopped before it was surrounded by an obsequious crowd, and Lafare was charmed to find himself the cynosure of all eyes. He haughtily demanded accommodation and supper. Meanwhile the huntsman had dismounted and thrown the bridle to a page, and was making towards the wing of the hotel where Hélène and her guardian were lodged.

"Very good, very good," muttered Dubois, nodding to himself. "All this is as clear as the pellucid brook; but how comes it that not a soul has recognized the horseman? Can it be that he is so taken up with the little wench that he has not noticed the carriage? We must look into this. . . . Oh! you may rest easy, Monseigneur," he continued; "I shall not disturb your *tête-à-tête*. You may continue at your leisure to practise this newly-acquired astuteness of yours which gives promise of flattering results. Ah! Monseigneur, it is plain enough you are short-sighted. . . ."

Soliloquising in this strain, Dubois left his room and went to resume his post of observation at the shutter. On looking through the aperture, he saw Gaston in the act of putting away his letter in a portfolio which he carefully placed in his coat-pocket. He then rose to go out.

"Sdeath!" muttered Dubois, "the pocket book—the very thing I want!" Instinctively he made a movement to grasp it, of course encountering only the wall, "and 'sdeath! I must have it too, at any price. . . . Aha! he's making ready to go out, our young gentleman—buckles on his sword, hey?—picks up his cloak. What's he up to, eh?—must see to this. Wait for his Royal Highness leaving, perhaps?—No; damme! that's not the expression a man wears who is expecting every moment to kill another. I'm rather inclined to think for to-night he will content himself with acting Jack Spaniard under the windows of his *amada*. Ecod! if that's his idea, perhaps we could—" It would be difficult to describe the smile which wrinkled Dubois' crafty countenance at that moment. "All very well," he continued, replying to his own thought, "but suppose I were to get myself slit as a result of my enterprise,—Monseigneur would never have done laughing. Pooh! there's no danger—our fellows are at their posts, no doubt, and you know the

saying, my friend 'Nothing venture—eh?'"

Fortified in spirit by the proverbial wisdom to which he had alluded, Dubois rapidly made the circuit of the hotel in order to present himself at one end of the alley at the moment when the Chevalier should appear at the other, assuming that Gaston's intention was purely and simply to promenade beneath the windows of his mistress—an assumption which his calm but melancholy expression had seemed to justify. Dubois had not been deceived with regard to his supporters. As he reached the end of the alley he found M. Tapin, who, having set his comrade L'Eveillé to keep a vigilant watch upon the inside of the yard, had taken his own station upon the outside. A couple of words sufficed to render the scheme plain to the spy.

Tapin pointed with his finger to one of his men lying full length upon the steps in front of a side-door; whilst a third, seated upon a mounting-block, was hideously twangling a species of Jew's harp such as itinerant street-singers use as an excuse for begging outside the taverns. A fourth man was somewhere close by, but was so well hidden that not a trace of him was visible.

Certain of being supported, Dubois covered himself up to the eyes in his cloak, and boldly entered the alley. Almost simultaneously he perceived a shadow advancing towards him from the other end, a shadow which showed every indication of being the person he sought. This indeed was the fact, for as the two men passed each other Dubois recognized the Chevalier. As for Gaston, wrapped up as he was in his own thoughts, he did not even glance at the man who met and passed him. It is very possible that he was unaware of his presence.

This negligence on the Chevalier's part did not meet Dubois' views. He desired to fasten a quarrel upon him; and finding that the other did not appear in the least inclined to resent his presence, he resolved to take the initiative.

In order to effect this, he turned and retraced his steps, stopping in front of the Chevalier, who had also stopped and was endeavouring to find out which of the four or five windows that looked out upon the alley were those of the room Hélène at that moment occupied. "Hey there, my friend," began Dubois in :

aspy voice, "what are you doing, pray, hanging about in front of the house at this time of night?"

Gaston's glance dropped from the skies to the earth, and his mind, which had been wandering in realms of phantasy, was compelled to occupy itself with the ordid concerns of this mundane existence. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said politely. "I think you were speaking to me?"

"Yes, sir; I was," replied Dubois. "I asked you what you were doing here."

"Pass on, if you please," said the Chevalier. "I am not interfering with you, and you have no occasion to trouble about me."

"Perhaps not; if you would cease to annoy me by your presence."

"The passage is certainly narrow, but I fancy there is quite room enough for both of us. You may walk on one side, sir, and I'll take the other."

"But I don't choose to share my promenade with you, sir. I invite you then to find another window to stare at; there are plenty of windows in Rambouillet, I imagine, and I give you the free choice of them."

"And why should I not look at these windows if I please?" enquired Chanlay, with some irritation.

"Because they belong to my wife's room," replied Dubois.

"Your wife——?"

"Yes, sir; my wife, who has just arrived from Paris; and I warn you, sir, I am of a very jealous disposition."

"The deuce!" thought Gaston; "this fellow is no doubt the husband of the woman who is taking charge of Hélène." It at once occurred to him that it would be wise to conciliate this important personage who might be of great use to him later. "Sir," he said, bowing politely to Dubois, "that, of course, alters the case entirely, and I am quite willing to concede the path to you, since I have no particular object in taking my walk here rather than elsewhere."

"The devil! he's as pleasant-mannered a conspirator as ever cut a throat," thought Dubois. "But it won't do; I must create a brawl somehow." Gaston was already walking away. "You are trying to deceive me, sir," shouted Dubois after him in a bullying voice.

The Chevalier turned sharply as though he had been stung. For Hélène's sake,

however, and for the sake of his enterprise, he restrained the impulse to inflict summary punishment for the insult. "Is it because I gave you a courteous answer that you doubt my word, sir?" he asked angrily.

"Oh, you are devilish polite, certainly; but that's because you are afraid. And it doesn't alter the fact that I caught you looking at this window."

"*Afraid!* you dare to say that to me!" cried Chanlay, turning upon his antagonist furiously. "Did you say I was *afraid*, sir?"

"That is what I said, sir," replied Dubois, in his most exasperating tone.

"Why, then, you are seeking a quarrel?"

"Ecod! sir, it seems a pretty obvious inference. Really," continued Dubois, speaking with great distinctness in his high-pitched voice, "one would think you had just escaped from your native wilds!" This last insult was beyond endurance, and instantly produced its calculated effect.

"*Sdeath!*" cried Gaston, tearing his sword from the scabbard. "Draw!—draw, I say, instantly!"

"Coats off, then, if you please," said Dubois, divesting himself of his cloak and preparing to take off his coat.

"Coats off? why?" asked the Chevalier.

"Because I haven't the honour of your acquaintance, sir; and it's not such an unusual thing for night-prowlers to wear clothes judiciously lined with steel-mail."

The words were scarcely out of Dubois' mouth before the Chevalier had flung his cloak to the ground. But just as Gaston, sword in hand, was about to spring upon his adversary, the man who had been lying apparently in a drunken sleep, lurched between his legs; the artist upon the Jews'-harp seized his sword-arm, the police-officer, Tapin, his left; whilst the fourth man, hitherto invisible, threw his arms round Gaston's body. "A duel!—a duel, sir!—what's all this?" cried the man. "In spite of his Majesty's orders! For shame, sir—for shame!" They dragged him away towards the door upon the steps of which the drunken man had been lying.

"You ruffians—it's a trap!" muttered Gaston between his set teeth. He feared to raise his voice lest Hélène should be compromised.

"Sir, we are betrayed," said Dubois, in the act of rolling the Chevalier's coat and cloak into a bundle and putting them under his arm, "but rest assured we shall meet again to-morrow." He ran back to the hotel as fast as his legs would carry him, whilst Gaston was being carried off for safe custody in the basement.

Dubois vaulted up the stairs and locked himself in his room. There he pulled out the Chevalier's precious portfolio and in a certain pocket of it a portion of a sequin broken in halves, and upon a small piece of paper, a man's name.

The broken coin was evidently a sign of recognition. It was equally evident that the name was that of the man with whom Gaston was to communicate, and he was called Captain La Jonquière. Besides, the paper was cut after a special pattern and shape.

"La Jonquière," muttered Dubois. "That's it—La Jonquière. Well, we must have an eye upon him, that's certain." He rapidly overhauled the rest of the pockets of the pocket-book, but found nothing besides. "Not a great deal, by any means," he said, "but I fancy it will be sufficient for our purpose." He folded a piece of paper in the same manner as the other, copied the name, and then rang the bell. There was a rap at the door, for it had been locked on the inside.

"Ah! yes; I had forgotten," said Dubois. He opened the door and the police-officer entered. "What have you done with him?" asked Dubois.

"We've locked him up in the cellars, and are keeping an eye on him."

"Put back these garments where he threw them, so that he finds them in the same place; make your excuses and let him go. Take care that nothing is missing from the pockets—neither portfolio, purse nor handkerchief—it is important that he should suspect nothing. At the same time you can bring me back my own coat and cloak which are lying upon the battle-field."

M. Tapin bowed to the ground and retired to execute his orders.

CHAPTER X

THE VISIT

THE incident we have described in the preceding chapter took place in the alley upon which, as we have said, the windows of Hélène's bedroom looked out. Consequently she had heard the brawling outside; and believing she could distinguish the Chevalier's voice among the others, she was hurrying to the window in some trepidation in order to find out the cause of the disturbance, when at that very moment the door opened and Madame Desroches entered the room. She had come to ask Hélène to return to the salon, as the person whom she had been expecting had arrived.

Hélène was startled, and felt for a moment as though she would fall. She would have desired to question Madame Desroches, but her voice failed her, and without a word she followed the duenna into the next room.

The place was in darkness, for all the candles had been purposely extinguished. Only a faint gleam from the dying embers in the grate rendered the surrounding objects dimly discernible, but without affording sufficient light to recognize the features of those present. Nevertheless Madame Desroches thought proper to make the darkness absolute by pouring some water from a carafe upon the embers in the grate. Then recommending Hélène not to be afraid, she retired. Next moment Hélène heard a voice behind the fourth door—the door which as we have said, had not hitherto been opened. In spite of herself, she trembled with apprehension as she crept toward the door, listening intently.

"Is all ready?" asked the voice.

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied Madame Desroches.

"*Monseigneur!*" murmured Hélène. "Good heavens! who can he be?"

"Is she alone?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And we shall not be interrupted?"

"Monseigneur may rely upon it."

"All the lights extinguished?"

"The room is in total darkness."

There was a sound of approaching footsteps, and then again silence.

"Come now, frankly," continued the voice after a pause, "is she as pretty as have been led to believe?"

"She is prettier than your Highness can imagine."

"*'Highness!'* Great heavens! What is she saying?" murmured the poor girl, almost ready to faint.

The door creaked upon its gilded hinges; a heavy tread made the floor groan in spite of the thick-piled carpet. Hélène felt the blood rush back to her heart.

"Mademoiselle," said the voice she had heard outside, "I beg you will accord me the favour of a hearing."

"I am here," murmured Hélène faintly. "Are you frightened?"

"I am indeed, Monsieur—should I say Monseigneur?"

"Say 'my friend.'"

Hélène felt her hand touched by that of the unknown.

"Madame Desroches, are you there?" she cried, shrinking away in spite of herself.

"Madame Desroches," reiterated the voice, "pray assure Mademoiselle that she is as safe here as if she were under the protection of the Church."

"Oh, forgive me, Monseigneur—I am at your feet."

"Rise, my child, and be seated. Madame Desroches, close all the doors. And now," continued the unknown, "pray give me your hand."

Hélène again extended her hand, and this time did not withdraw it. "It is still trembling, I fear," she murmured.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the unknown. "Surely, dear child, you are not afraid of me still?"

"No," replied Hélène; "but your clasp gives me a strange feeling—a shuddering sensation I cannot account for..."

"Speak to me, Hélène," said the unknown in a tone of tender sympathy. "I have already been told that you are beautiful, but this is the first time I have heard the sound of your voice. Speak—I am listening."

"Then you have never seen me?" inquired Hélène, with some gentle curiosity.

"Do you remember when, two years ago, the Abbess had your portrait painted?"

"Yes, I remember; by a painter who came from Paris solely for that purpose, they told me."

"It was I who gave the artist his commission."

"And was the portrait for yourself?"

"I have it here," replied the unknown, taking a miniature from his pocket. Hélène of course could not see the picture, but as she touched the frame she felt assured that it was the painting in question.

"But what interest could you have in keeping the portrait of a poor orphan?"

"Hélène," replied the unknown, after a moment's pause, "I am your father's oldest friend."

"My father!" cried Hélène. "Then he is alive?"

"Yes."

"And some day I shall see him?"

"It may be."

"Oh! I bless you for bringing me this good news," cried Hélène, warmly pressing the stranger's hand.

"Dear child!" murmured the unknown.

"But if he is alive," continued Hélène with a trace of doubt, "why has he never made any enquiries about his daughter?"

"He received news of you every month, and although far away, he was watching over you, Hélène."

"Yet you have yourself told me," said Hélène, with a slight accent of reproach, "that for sixteen years he has not seen me."

"Believe me, dear girl," replied the other, "that only considerations of the greatest moment could have induced him to deprive himself of that happiness."

"I do believe you, Monsieur, and it is not for me to reproach my father."

"No; but it is for you to forgive him if he accuse himself."

"For me to forgive him!" cried Hélène, astonished.

"Yes; and since he cannot ask you himself, I am come to ask your forgiveness in his name."

"I do not understand."

"Then listen to me."

"I am listening."

"But first give me your hand again."

"Here it is."

There was a pause, as though the stranger were striving to recall memories; then he went on: "Your father held a command in the army under the late King. At the battle of Nerwinden, while he was charging at the head of the Household troops, one of his subalterns, named M. de Chaverny, fell close beside him stricken by a bullet. Your father

tried to assist him, but the injury was mortal; and the wounded man, knowing that he had but a few moments to live, shook his head and said faintly, 'It is useless to think of me, but I charge you, take care of my daughter.' Your father pressed the hand of the dying man in token of promise; and De Chaverny, who had raised himself upon one knee, fell back and almost immediately expired; as though he had been waiting only for that assurance before closing his eyes in death. . . . You are listening, Hélène, are you not?"

"Oh! can you ask?" cried Hélène.

"Well," continued the unknown, "as soon as the campaign was ended, your father's first care was for the little orphan, a charming girl of ten or twelve, giving promise even at that age of beauty equal to your own. De Chaverny's death left the child entirely unprovided for; and your father had her sent to the Convent of the Visitation in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, announcing his intention of providing a dowry for her when she should reach a suitable age."

"I render thanks to Heaven," cried Hélène, "that I am the daughter of a man who so faithfully kept his promises."

"Wait a little, Hélène," rejoined the other, "for you are about to learn how your father ceased to deserve your praise." Hélène was silent; and the unknown continued: "Your father, indeed, fulfilled his engagement, and watched over the orphan until she reached her eighteenth year. She was then a lovely and charming girl, and your father began to discover that his visits to the Convent had become longer and more frequent than strict duty required. The truth was that he had fallen in love with his ward. When your father could no longer deceive himself as to the motive of his visits, he reproached himself bitterly, for he remembered the promise he had made to M. de Chaverny as he lay wounded to death, and he knew that it was keeping his promise but ill to tamper with the girl's affections. Therefore, in order to remedy the matter, he begged the Superior to seek a suitable husband for Mlle. de Chaverny. Soon afterwards he learned that a nephew of the Abbess, a young gentleman of Brittany, having seen her when upon a visit to his aunt, had fallen in love with her and had expressed his ardent wish to obtain her hand"

"And then, Monsieur?" asked Hélène, perceiving that her companion paused in his story.

"Then, Hélène, to his great surprise your father learned, from the lips of the Superior herself that Mlle. de Chaverny had formed the resolution of remaining unmarried. She declared that her dearest wish was to be allowed to remain in the Convent where she had been educated, and that the day upon which she took the vows would be the happiest of her life."

"She was in love, was she not?" asked Hélène.

"Yes, my child," replied the unknown, "you have rightly guessed the reason which impelled her to make that avowal. Ah, one cannot escape destiny! Mlle. de Chaverny loved your father. Long had she kept her secret hidden in her own breast, until one day your father, feeling it his duty to dissuade her from taking the veil, questioned her narrowly as to her motive. The poor girl, unable any longer to conceal her feelings, confessed all. Strong to resist his own passion while he believed she had no such feeling towards himself, your father yielded when he found that he had but to speak in order to obtain the fulfilment of his desires. Both were young — your father was scarcely twenty-five, and Mlle. de Chaverny not yet eighteen—and both in their youthful ardour deemed the world well lost if only they might be happy together."

"But since they loved each other, why could they not marry?" enquired Hélène.

"Unhappily marriage was impossible on account of the wide difference which separated them. Have I not said, Hélène, that your father is of high station?"

"Yes, ah! yes, I know it," replied Hélène.

"For a year," continued the other, "their happiness was greater than they had dared to hope; at the end of that time, Hélène, you were born into the world, and . . ."

"And—?" the young girl ventured timidly.

"And your birth cost your mother her life."

Hélène began sobbing quietly.

"Yes," continued the unknown, his voice betraying the deep emotion called up by these memories; "yes, you may well weep for your mother, Hélène. She was a noble-hearted woman whom you

father has never ceased to remember with loving tenderness. Nor have the troubles he has since passed through—nor the follies of which, perhaps, he has been guilty—ever been able to efface her memory. More—he has transferred to you, dear child, all the love he bore your mother.”

“Yet my father permitted me to leave him, and has never seen me from the time of my birth,” said *Hélène* in a tone of gentle reproach.

“*Hélène*,” replied the other, “forgive your father this seeming negligence, for indeed, the fault was not his. You were born in the year 1703—that is to say, at a time when the most rigid maxims prevailed at the court of Louis XIV. Your father had already fallen under the King’s displeasure—or rather, was out of favour with Madame de Maintenon—and for your sake rather than for his own he decided to send you away into Brittany, and confided you to the care of good Mother Ursula, the Superior of the Convent where you have been brought up. Upon the decease of Louis XIV. the old order changed entirely throughout France, and your father decided to have you near him. You cannot have failed to notice how carefully he provided for your safety on the journey, and to-day—to-day when he knew that you were to arrive at Rambouillet—well, he had not patience to wait longer. He came to meet you, *Hélène*.”

“Great heavens!” cried *Hélène*, “can it be true?”

“And seeing you—or rather, listening to your voice—he has almost thought he heard your mother speaking, for her voice had the same sweet tone as your own. Oh! *Hélène*, may your life be happier than hers! That is all I ask of Heaven.”

“Oh,” cried *Hélène*, “how your hand trembles! You say—you tell me my father has come here to meet me?”

“Yes.”

“He is here . . . in Rambouillet?”

“He is here.”

“And you say—ah! you said he had been happy in seeing me?”

“Yes, in truth, very happy.”

“Yet he could not rest content—am I not right? He wished to speak to me—to tell me the story of my birth. He wished to hear me thank him for his love—to ask his blessing. Oh!” cried *Hélène*, falling upon her knees, “here at

your feet I pray you to give me your blessing, father!”

“*Hélène*! my child—my dear daughter! Not there—not at my feet, but in my arms!” He embraced her tenderly, and continued: “Ah! my child, I came here with a very different intention—I was prepared to make no avowal, to remain a stranger to you. But when I found you beside me—when I pressed your hand and heard your sweet voice, I had not the strength to keep my resolve. But I am sure you will never cause me to repent of my weakness—you will keep my secret faithfully—”

“Be sure I will never betray it!”

“Then I am satisfied. Yet listen to what I have to tell you, for now I must leave you.”

“Oh, father, must we part so soon?”

“My child, it must be.”

“Speak, then, father; it will be my duty and my pleasure to obey you.”

“To-morrow you will set out for Paris. The house which you will occupy is now in readiness for you. Madame Desroches, to whom I have given all directions, will accompany you; and I shall hasten to visit you there at the earliest moment my duties will permit.”

“And that will be soon, will it not, father? You will not forget that I am alone in the world.”

“It will not be long, I hope, before I see you again.” So saying, the unknown kissed *Hélène* upon the forehead with fatherly tenderness and with a murmured farewell he left her.

A few minutes afterwards Madame Desroches re-entered the room with a candle in her hand. She found *Hélène* kneeling in prayer with her head resting upon the arm of a chair; and unwilling to interrupt her devotions, Madame Desroches placed the candle upon the mantel-piece and again withdrew.

Hélène remained for some while longer in prayer; then she rose and looked around her with the feeling of one who has just awakened from a dream. But everything was as she had last seen it, and seemed to bear witness to the reality of the strange interview which she had had with her newly-found father. The candle left by Madame Desroches lit up the room but faintly—the door, hitherto closed, which Madame Desroches had left half-opened—and beyond all this, the deep emotion which filled the young girl’s

heart convinced her that it had been no trick of the imagination, but a great event which had taken place in her life. Then, amidst the crowd of her hurrying thoughts, the remembrance of Gaston rose in her mind. The father, whose arrival she had so greatly dreaded, but whom she had found so kind and affectionate—the father who himself had loved and suffered so deeply, would surely never seek to thwart her affections; the more surely that Gaston, although not precisely of exalted birth, belonged to one of the most ancient families in Brittany. Above all, because she loved Gaston so dearly that she felt she could not live without him; and if her father's affection were sincere, he could not wish his daughter's death.

It might be that there was some impediment on Gaston's side, but such an obstacle could not be otherwise than slight in comparison with that which Héléne on her side believed she had overcome. No doubt it could be easily removed; and the young people's future, which had seemed so dark, already appeared to Héléne charged with hope and giving unequivocal promise of a speedy fulfilment of their dearest wishes.

Upon this smiling picture Héléne fell asleep, and the joyous colour of her waking thoughts was reflected in her dreams.

As for Gaston, his liberty had been restored to him with the most profuse apologies on the part of those responsible for his seizure, who averred that they had mistaken him for some other person. He had hastened with considerable anxiety in search of his coat and cloak, and had found them, to his great relief, on the spot where he had flung them; then returning to his room in the *Tigre-Royal* and carefully locking the door, he had hastily opened the portfolio. It was just as he had left it, evidently untouched, and in the separate pocket lay the broken gold coin and the paper with Captain La Jonquière's address, which latter, for still further security, he immediately burned.

Then feeling, if not happier, at least more easy in his mind—for he attributed the events of the evening to one of those numerous accidents likely to be incurred by a man who roams the streets at nights—he retired to bed, after giving Owen his orders for the morrow, and dreamed of Héléne, as she was dreaming of him.

Meanwhile two carriages were leaving the inn door. Two gentlemen in hunting livery were in the first, which was well lit and attended by four men on horseback, two in front and two behind.

The second, which was without lamps, was occupied by a man clad in a civilian cloak, and followed the first carriage at a distance of a few hundred paces, but keeping it always in sight. Only upon reaching the *Barrière de l'Étoile* did they separate; and whilst the carriage with the lighted lamps drew up at the foot of the grand staircase of the *Palais-Royal*, the other continued its way to the little door in the *Rue de Valois*. Both had reached Paris without untoward incident.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH DUBOIS PROVES THAT HIS SECRET POLICE WAS BETTER ORGANIZED AT A COST OF HALF-A-MILLION THAN OUR PRESENT FORCE AT SIX TIMES THAT AMOUNT.

NO matter how the Duc d'Orléans spent his nights—and they were ordinarily devoted to the most fatiguing dissipations—he never permitted his pleasures to interfere with the methodical ordering of his daily duties. His mornings were devoted to business, and to each separate kind of business a special day was allotted. He was accustomed to begin work before he was dressed, either alone or in company with Dubois. Afterwards he held a short and select levée, and this again was followed by a series of audiences which usually kept him occupied until eleven or twelve o'clock. Then he received the heads of the various councils, beginning with La Vrillière; then Leblanc, who rendered an account of his office as secret-service agent; Torcy next, who brought for his perusal such letters of importance as he had abstracted in course of transit. Finally he received the *Maréchal de Villeroy*, with whom, if we may trust Saint-Simon, he merely made a show of transacting business. At half-past two the Regent had his chocolate—the only

refreshment he took during the morning—whilst laughing and chatting with his visitors. This afforded him half-an-hour's release from affairs. Afterwards there was an audience for ladies; this finished, it was the Regent's habit to wait upon the Duchesse d'Orléans. Thence he went to see the young King, a daily visit which was never omitted, though the hour might be changed according to circumstances; and by his dutiful manner he presented a pattern to all who approached his Majesty. These daily duties were augmented once a week by a reception of the heads of the foreign legations; and on Sundays and holidays he also attended mass in his private chapel.

At six o'clock in the evening on those days when the Council met, or at five on other days, all business was finished. The Regent then went either to the opera or to visit Madame de Berri. This latter distraction, by the way, would need in future to be replaced by some other, since, as we have seen, he had quarrelled with his daughter on account of her marriage with Riom. And at last came the hour for those famous suppers of his, which took place either at Saint-Cloud or Saint-Germain in summer, or in winter at the Palais-Royal.

The guests at these suppers seldom numbered less than ten or more than fifteen. Among the more frequent of the male guests were the Duc de Broglie, Noël, Brancas, Biron and Canillac, together with certain fashionable young spendthrifts—birds of passage, as Saint-Simon calls them—notable for their wit and notorious for their profligacy. The ladies whom they were accustomed to meet were Mesdames de Parabère, de Phalaris, de Sabran and d'Averne; some *chanteuse* or *danseuse* from the opera, who happened to be the rage at the moment; frequently the Duchesse de Berri. It need scarcely be said that the Regent's presence was never felt as a constraint, but rather added to the license and freedom of his guests.

The most perfect equality reigned at these convivial gatherings: Kings, Ministers, Councillors, ladies of the court, all came under the lash, and had their characters vilified or rendered ridiculous with mordant yet polished satire; for among the brilliant wits who foregathered at the Regent's table the French language had acquired the terseness of the

Latin, and was in no way inferior to the classic tongue in epigrammatic point.

Indeed, it was permissible on these occasions to say or do anything, provided only that it were said or done wittily and with judgment. The Regent took such delight in these suppers that when the hour had struck and the last guest arrived, the door was locked and barricaded behind him, so that no matter what might happen, whether of importance to the State or to the Regent himself, it was useless to attempt to reach him until the door was unfastened next morning, when the party broke up.

Dubois was seldom among the chosen few, for the sufficient reason that his poor health forbade it. His enemies therefore seized their opportunities and gleefully tore his reputation into tatters, to the infinite amusement of the Duc d'Orléans, who not only applauded these attacks upon his Minister, but joined in them himself with all the delight of a school-boy plotting mischief against his master. Dubois was well aware that the rending of his *vile corpus* formed the most attractive feature of these gatherings, but as he also knew that the Regent invariably forgot by the morning what had been said the previous night, he could afford to treat all such assaults upon his reputation with indifference, since he found that they in no way damaged his credit as an astute and valuable Minister.

Thus the Regent, who daily became more indolent and careless as to his personal safety, felt that he could rely upon Dubois' vigilance. Dubois watched whilst the Regent slept or amused himself. The little man, seemingly frail, was in fact indefatigable. He seemed to be gifted with ubiquity—wherever the Regent went he was always in attendance, gliding behind him like a shadow, his strange ferrety little face lurking in doorways and corridors, always within hearing of his master's voice.

Having returned from Rambouillet where, as we have seen, he displayed so much solicitude for the Regent's safety, Dubois had sent for his agent Tapin, who, mounted upon an excellent horse and wearing the Orléans livery, had made the journey to Paris among the Regent's attendants without having been recognised in the darkness. After an hour's conversation with the police-agent, Dubois gave him his instructions for

the next day and then retired to sleep for a few hours. He rose early, and chuckling to himself as he thought of the advantage he had acquired over the Regent—an advantage by which he intended to profit to the utmost—he presented himself at seven o'clock at the door of his Highness' bedroom. As usual, the Regent's valet opened the door to Dubois without question.

The Regent was still sleeping. Dubois approached the bed and stood regarding him for some moments with a mischievous smile upon his ape-like countenance; then he made up his mind to awaken him.

"Halloo, halloo! wake up, Monseigneur, wake up!" he cried.

The Duc d'Orléans opened his eyes and recognised Dubois. Feeling inclined to sleep a little longer, and wishing to be rid of a troublesome visitor, he tried the effect of rudeness. "'Tis you, Abbé, is it?" he muttered sleepily. "Oh, go to the Deuce!" Coolly turning his back upon his Minister, he disposed himself once more to slumber.

Habit had rendered Dubois quite callous to such little rebuffs. "I've just been there, Monseigneur," he replied, "but they were too busy to attend to me, so they sent me on to you."

"Go away, Dubois. I'm tired."

"I'm not surprised. A stormy night, eh?"

"What are you talking about?" asked the Duke, turning half round.

"I say the way you spent the night scarcely helps you to keep an appointment at seven o'clock in the morning."

"Did I tell you to be here at seven, Abbé?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; yesterday morning, before you left for Saint-Germain."

"Ecod! you are right," said the Regent.

"Your Highness had not anticipated that the night would be so fatiguing, perhaps."

"Fatiguing? Why, I left the supper-table at seven!"

"Ah, yes . . . but afterwards—"

"Well, what?"

"I trust at least, Monseigneur, you found the young lady worth the journey."

"Journey, what journey?"

"Why, the one you made *after* seven o'clock."

"To listen to you, one would suppose

it an unheard-of thing to return here from Saint-Germain."

"H'm—it's only a step from here to Saint-Germain, certainly—but there is a means of lengthening the route."

"How?"

"If you make the journey by way of Rambouillet, for instance."

"Pooh! You are dreaming, Abbé."

"Good! I am dreaming. And your Highness will observe, when you hear my dream, that even in my dreams I am still occupied with your affairs."

"More of your nonsense, I suppose."

"By no means. I dreamed that your Highness, having put up a stag at the cross-roads of Le Treillage, the animal, with the urbanity of a courtly beast, never ran beyond a range of four square leagues, and finally permitted itself to be brought to bay at Chambourcy."

"So far your dream has a certain appearance of truth. Proceed, Abbé, proceed."

"After that, your Highness returned to Saint-Germain, and sat down to dinner at half-past five, giving orders that a plain carriage should be ready at half-past seven."

"Not at all bad, Abbé."

"And accordingly at half-past seven, Monseigneur dismissed everybody with the exception of Lafare, with whom he entered the carriage."

"Go on, go on."

"You took the road to Rambouillet, where you arrived at a quarter to ten; only you stopped the carriage on the outskirts of the town, got down and took a horse which was in readiness for you, and whilst Lafare continued his journey towards the *Tigre-Royal* inn, your Highness followed him on horseback."

"Ah! and that is where your dream becomes a trifle confused, is it not, Abbé?"

"No, Monseigneur, not noticeably."

"Well, go on, then."

"Well, whilst that fatuous idiot Lafare was rejoicing in the title of 'Excellency' and making a pretence of eating the ill-cooked and filthily served supper, your Highness handed over your horse to the care of a page and betook himself to a certain little pavilion."

"You are the devil himself! But where were you hiding, ye dog?"

"I, Monseigneur? Of course, I was at the Palais-Royal, enjoying my well-

earned repose—and the proof of it is that I am now telling you the dream I had.”

“And who was inside the pavilion?”

“In the first place there was a frightful monster of a duenna, tall, shrivelled and bilious-looking.”

“Dubois, I will beg Desroches to bear you in mind, and you may rest assured the first time she meets you she will scratch your eyes out.”

“And then, inside the room—aha!—inside the room, Monseigneur—”

“And that’s where your dream breaks off, eh? Poor old Abbé! You couldn’t see inside the room, even in a dream.”

“Oh! couldn’t I, though! I trust, for your own sake, Monseigneur, you would suppress that half-million you pay me annually for my secret police if it failed to render me capable of seeing in the dark, through closed doors.”

“Well, what did you see in this case?”

“What did I see! what did I see! A charming little creature—a little girl from Brittany of about seventeen—a sweetly pretty little soul straight from the Augustinian Nunnery at Clisson. She was under the charge of one of the nuns during the journey to Rambouillet, but no doubt the good Sister was a trifle in the way, hey? At any rate she was promptly packed off.”

“Dubois, you are the Devil himself masquerading as an abbé for the sole purpose of compassing my damnation!”

“Not so; for your salvation, Monseigneur,—for your salvation, let me tell you.”

“Well, have it your own way.”

“Come, now, tell me,” continued Dubois, leering abominably, “did you find the little girl to your liking, Monseigneur?”

“Charming, Dubois, charming!”

“Ecod, and so she ought to be; for after fetching her all that long way, if you had found her otherwise than charming, you would have been robbed.”

The Regent grew serious and frowned; then upon reflection he perceived that although Dubois knew everything up to a certain point, he was entirely in error with regard to the rest, and his frown gave place to a smile—“Really and truly you are a great man, Dubois,” he said.

“That, Monseigneur, is indisputable, and everybody knows it. And yet I am in disgrace!”

“In disgrace?”

“Certainly, since you have taken to concealing your love-affairs from me.”

“Come, you have no occasion to be annoyed, Dubois.”

“Oh! but I have, I tell you plainly.”

“How is that?”

“Because I could very easily have found you a lady-love equally good and perhaps better. Why the deuce could you not tell me you wanted a girl from Brittany? Rest assured she would have been forthcoming, Monseigneur.”

“Really?”

“Lord! yes; could get ’em wholesale if I wanted.”

“The same sort, think you?”

“The same sort! Far better, I should hope!”

“Abbé—!”

“*Parbleu!* You were pretty well taken in with that one!”

“Dubois—!”

“Shouldn’t wonder if you think you have found a treasure!”

“Careful, Dubois!”

“But when I’ve told you what this little girl is, and what you have laid yourself open to—

“I’m not inclined to tolerate any of your pleasantries, so be careful!”

“Really, Monseigneur, you grieve me,” said Dubois shaking his head reproachfully.

“What do you mean?”

“You have been taken in by appearances—you are infatuated like a callow youth who loses his heart to the first girl he sees, and swears she is perfection. Is she really so very pretty, Monseigneur, this little girl?”

“Charming, I tell you.”

“And as good as she is pretty, eh?—one out of a hundred, what?”

“You have said it, my dear man.”

“Well, then, I’m prepared to assert that you have been well and properly done.”

“Confound—!”

“Yes; I grieve to say your nice little girl from Brittany is a minx.”

“Silence, Abbé!”

“Why? Surely I may tell you—”

“I forbid you to say another word,” interrupted the Duke in a serious tone.

“Monseigneur, you also have suffered from bad dreams: permit me to explain.”

“Master Joseph, Master Joseph! I shall have to send you to the Bastille!”

“Send me to the Bastille, if you like.”

Monseigneur, but I must tell you all the same that this little baggage——”

“Is my *daughter*, Monsieur l'Abbé!”

Dubois gave a startled jump; his wicked grin of assurance gave place to an expression of profound stupefaction. “Your *daughter*, Monseigneur? And by whom, in heaven's name?”

“A good woman, Abbé, who had the good fortune to die before she could make your acquaintance.”

“And the child?”

“Has been brought up in concealment, lest she should be contaminated by contact with poisonous creatures such as yourself.”

Dubois received the compliment with a bow, and then retired respectfully with all the appearance of a man who has had a profound disappointment. But, as we are aware, Dubois was not the man to be easily cast down. He permitted the Regent to enjoy the unwonted spectacle of his Minister's discomfiture until the door had closed behind him. Any such feeling as he might momentarily have felt was, however, instantly dispelled by the swift assurance that the matter could not but have brilliant consequences for himself.—“And to think I should have said,” he muttered gleefully as he descended the stairs, “that this conspiracy would be the means of procuring my archbishop's mitre! Ass that I am! With proper care and attention it can be made to yield me my cardinal's hat beyond all shadow of doubt.”

CHAPTER XII

AT RAMBOUILLET AGAIN

AT the appointed time Gaston, burning with impatience, had presented himself at Hélène's door; but as Madame Desroches had some scruples as to the propriety of admitting him, he had still some while to wait in the ante-chamber. On this point Hélène expressed herself with admirable clearness and decision, declaring her ability to judge for herself what was, or was not, proper to be done in the circumstances, and furthermore that it was her intention to receive M. de Livry, the brother of her

dear friend, who had come to take leave of her. It will not have been forgotten that De Livry was the name which Gaston had assumed during the journey; and this name he intended to retain, except for such persons as were connected with the business which had called him to the Capital.

Madame Desroches accordingly retired to her own room in a rather spiteful humour, yet firmly resolved to hear what passed between the young people if it could be accomplished by eavesdropping. Suspecting her amiable intention, however, Hélène was careful to frustrate it by closing and bolting the outer door.

“Ah! Gaston, at last!” she said. “I have been expecting you. Last night I could not sleep.”

“Nor I, Hélène. But stay a moment and let me admire all these splendours.” Hélène smiled. “Yourself first of all—what a pretty gown—why, you have arranged your hair differently! Oh! but you look charming in this costume!”

“Thank you; but you don't *look* very pleased!”

Gaston made no reply: he continued his investigations. “These hangings are good. . . . Pictures uncommonly good. Gilded cornices, eh? Your guardians are evidently rich people, Hélène.”

“So I believe,” replied the girl with a smile; “yet I have been told that the hangings and the gilding which you admire—and which I also admired—are antiquated and old-fashioned, and are to be replaced by better.”

“I perceive that Hélène is about to become a high and puissant dame,” said Gaston, forcing a smile. “Already she makes me wait for an audience.”

“Oh! but, Gaston, how often you have waited there on the lake for hours at a time in the boat.”

“Yes; but then you were in a convent, and I was obliged to wait the good pleasure of the Mother Superior.”

“A sacred title—one which gives a feeling of security, which imposes respectful obedience—is it not so?”

“Assuredly.”

“Then, dear Gaston, you may judge if I am happy! Here I have found the same loving care—stronger affection, even; more constant and dependable.”

“Eh!” exclaimed Gaston, his attention sharply roused.

"I have found ——"

"In Heaven's name, speak out!"

"My father ——"

"Your father! Ah, my dear H      , how happy you make me! I share your joy—how glad I feel that my dear girl has a father to care for her, a father who watches over my betrothed!"

"True, he watches over me . . . but from afar."

"How?—Will you not be with him?"

"Alas, it seems that there are considerations which force my father to remain apart from me."

"Is it a secret?"

"A secret even to myself; else you should know the reason, be assured. I have no secrets from you, Gaston."

"Some misfortune of birth—some sentence of attainder, perhaps, in your family? A temporary obstacle, no doubt."

"I do not know."

"Then evidently it is a secret. But," continued Gaston with a smile, "I trust you absolutely, and you shall, if it please you—and if your father has enjoined it—leave me entirely in ignorance. But, without risk of offending you, may I ask a few questions?"

"Why, of course."

"Does he fulfil your expectations? Is he a father of whom you can be proud?"

"Indeed, I think so. He appears to be good and noble-hearted—his voice is kind."

"His voice! Why . . . Does he resemble you at all?"

"I do not know—I have not seen him."

"Not seen him!"

"No . . . it was dark."

"Your father had no wish to see his daughter!—and such a daughter! Really, that is scarce fatherly."

"Oh! you judge him unjustly. Indeed, he knows me well, for he has my portrait—that portrait, you remember, which caused you to be so jealous last spring."

"But I cannot understand——"

"I have told you, it was dark."

"Very well; but for what purpose are these chandeliers intended?" said Gaston, with a constrained smile.

"Of course, when one wishes to be seen; but when one has reasons for concealment——"

"What is this you are telling me?" rejoined Gaston, who had become thoughtful. "What reasons can a father have to conceal himself from his daughter?"

"Good reasons, I am convinced; and you, being a man, should understand them better than I do. Still, I am not surprised——"

"Oh! my dear H      !" cried Gaston, now very serious, "what dreadful ideas are you putting into my mind?"

"Dreadful ideas! . . You frighten me, Gaston!"

"Tell me: of what did your father speak?"

"He told me how tenderly he had always loved me." Gaston started. "He vowed that my future happiness was assured, that there should be no more uncertainty as to my fate, for that henceforward those considerations which had induced him to disown me would no longer weigh with him."

"Words—words! . . . But what proof did he give you of this love of his? . . . Ah! forgive these mad questions, H      . An abyss of calamity opens before my eyes, and I could find it in me to wish, for a moment, that your angelic innocence, which is my pride and joy, should give place to the hateful wisdom of the Pit, in order that you might understand and that I might avoid the shame of sullyng your purity with these vile questions, which are yet unavoidable if we look for happiness in the future."

"I scarcely understand your question, Gaston, else I would reply."

"Did he show great affection towards you?"

"Assuredly—great affection."

"But in the darkness—when he approached to speak to you?"

"He took my hand, and his hand trembled more than my own."

Gaston clenched his fists convulsively. —"He gave you a fatherly embrace, did he not?"

"He gave me a kiss—on the forehead—only one kiss, and I knelt to receive it."

"H      ! my poor H      !" cried the Chevalier, "you are confirming my worst fears: he has abused your innocence—you have fallen into his Devil's snare. This man who conceals himself, fearing the light—this man who calls you his daughter—he is not your father, H      !"

"Gaston, you will break my heart."

"Angels might envy your innocence, Hélène; but in this wicked world all holy things are abused; evil men have besmirched and made a mockery of the angels themselves. This man I will seek out—I will find him, and, by violence if necessary, force him to acknowledge the spotless honour of the girl who has given me her love. I will force him to confess if he be the most degraded of mankind; and I will know if I may regard him as a father, or, failing that, I will kill him like a dog!"

"Gaston, you are distraught—what are you saying? How can you suspect such frightful treachery? But since you awaken suspicion in me—since you explore those foul recesses of the human heart which I had never allowed myself to contemplate—I will answer you with equal frankness. Did not this man hold me in his power as you have said? These rooms, do they not belong to him? And the people by whom I am surrounded, are they not entirely devoted to his wishes? . . . Gaston, you misjudge my father cruelly, and if you love me, you will ask my forgiveness for having harboured such evil thoughts." Gaston, with a despairing gesture, flung himself into a chair. —"Do not taint the only pure joy I have ever tasted," continued Hélène. "Do not poison the happiness of a lifetime which is just beginning for me. How often have I wept to think I must pass my life alone, abandoned, without other affection than that for which Heaven bids us strive! Let the filial affection and duty I owe to my father make atonement for my loving you almost to idolatry, for such a passion is culpable in the sight of Heaven, and has oftentimes filled me with remorse."

"You are right, Hélène," cried Gaston; "forgive me. Yes, you make me sensible that contact with my gross and earthly being will but sully your pure joys and, it may be, the noble affection for your father. Yet I implore you, Hélène, by all we hold sacred, not to disregard the fears prompted by my experience and the love I bear you. It would not be the first time that the evil passions of men have traded upon innocent credulity. It is but a weak argument that you have advanced; for to have testified a guilty love at the first interview would have been a mistake which none of those experienced

villains would have committed. No; they scheme to sap the virtue in your hearts little by little; they corrupt your senses by unaccustomed luxury, by sights and sounds pleasing by their novelty; gradually you become used to these new impressions, and at length they win you by persuasion—a sweeter victory than that brought about by violence. Ah, Hélène, do not scorn the counsel of a man who knows the world, and do not forget that it is my love for you which impels me to speak — my humble and devoted love, as you would see, were I able to recognise in this man a father who is indeed your true parent."

Hélène drooped her head and had no words to reply.

"Make no wilful resolution, I entreat you," continued Gaston; "but jealously watch everything around you. Especially mistrust any perfumes or wines which may be given you. Watch over your honour, Hélène, for it is my honour also, and my life and happiness."

"Dear, I will obey you; yet believe me, I shall love my father none the less."

"As much as you will, dearest, if only I be mistaken."

"That is noble, and like you, my own Gaston. And now we are quite in agreement."

"At the faintest suspicion, write to me."

"Write! Are you leaving me, then?"

"I must go to Paris upon a business of which you know something already . . . I shall stay at the *Muid d'Amour*, a tavern in the Rue des Bourdonnais. That is the address you must write to, and be careful to show it no person whatever."

"But what is the reason of all these precautions?"

Gaston hesitated—"Because, if your protector were known, his plans to assist you in case of need might be frustrated."

"Oh! well, you are always a trifle mysterious, my dearest Gaston! I have a father, and he hides himself; and I also have a . . . lover,—you see, I still find the word a little difficult—and he is about to do the same."

"But with regard to the lover, you know that his intentions are honest," said Gaston, forcing a laugh in order to hide the embarrassment caused by hearing himself thus described.

"*Sh!* Madam Desroches is coming. I hear her opening her door. No doubt she thinks you have been here too long; I am under supervision, you see, as if I were still at the convent."

Accepting his dismissal, Gaston placed a kiss upon the hand which Hélène held out to him. Next moment Madame Desroches appeared. Hélène dropped a formal curtsy to which Gaston responded with his most ceremonious bow. Whilst this silent comedy was being enacted, Madame Desroches fixed upon the Chevalier so scrutinizing a look that it cannot be doubted she would have been able to furnish as exact a description of his personal appearance as any police-spy after the most ample opportunities of observing a suspected criminal.

Gaston immediately set out for Paris.

Owen had been impatiently awaiting his master's re-appearance. He had sewn up his money in the waistband of his nether garments, fearing lest the jingle of the coins might betray him were he to keep them in his leathern pouch. It is probable also that it afforded him gratification to feel the gold as near as possible to his person.

After three hours' travelling they arrived in Paris. Owen had no occasion this time to reproach his master with dawdling, for both the horses and their riders were flecked with foam when they reached the *Barrière de la Conférence*.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN LA JONQUIÈRE

IN the Rue des Bourdonnais, as the attentive reader has had an opportunity of noting, was situated a tavern. Not to contradict the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay, we call it a tavern; although it might justifiably have aspired to style itself an inn, being tolerably well appointed as inns go, and providing such people as desired to make a lengthened stay with accommodation and refreshment—more especially refreshment of the liquid variety.

In the course of his nocturnal interview with Dubois, Maître Tapin had become acquainted with the name of La

Jonquière and had transmitted it to his subordinate L'Eveillé who, in his turn, had passed it on to all the chiefs of divisions. They had at once instituted a search for the gallant officer in question. With the promptitude and resourcefulness which forms the chief virtue of police-agents, they had immediately started by a thorough investigation of all the gambling-hells and other houses of doubtful reputation in Paris. Cellamare's conspiracy, of which we have given an account in our story entitled *The Chevalier d'Harmental*—a story which is concerned with the earlier part of the Regency, while the present history deals with its end—Cellamare's conspiracy, we say, had indeed taught all those whose duty it was to hunt down plotters against established authority that such gentry were frequently to be found in places of this kind. This affair in Brittany was but the tail of the Spanish conspiracy. But in *cauda venenum*, as Dubois remarked, who, with his ineradicable taint of pedantry, never failed to air his Latinity.

The whole force, as we have said, was engaged in the search; but whether it was due to superior acumen, or whether it was merely the result of good fortune, M. Tapin it was who, after a two hours' expedition, full of incident, in out-of-the-way quarters of the capital, made the first discovery of any value. In the Rue des Bourdonnais, at the sign of the *Muid d'Amour*, he lighted upon the famous hostelry of which we have spoken at the commencement of this chapter—a discovery excellent in itself, but eclipsed by the fact that therein lodged the celebrated Captain La Jonquière who at that moment was a sort of nightmare to Dubois. Mistaking the police-agent for a superannuated lawyer's clerk, the landlord answered his question affably; and informed him that although Captain La Jonquière certainly lodged in his hotel, he was not accessible for the moment; for the gallant officer, having only returned in the small hours, was still sleeping. This statement seemed the more plausible from the fact that it was even then barely six o'clock in the morning.

This was all the information M. Tapin required. Being a man of a severely logical cast of mind, he advanced from premise to deduction with almost algebraic precision. Captain La Jonquière was

asleep; therefore he was in bed. He was in bed; therefore he was in the hotel.

The police-agent at once returned to the Palais-Royal. He found Dubois in excellent humour; for having just left the Regent, his mind was running upon the flattering prospect of obtaining his Cardinal's hat at no distant date. Had it not been for Dubois' unusual good humour, it would have gone hard with all his emissaries. They would without doubt all have been summarily dismissed for their excess of zeal in having arrested and locked up in the For-l'Évêque a number of spurious La Jonquières. Among those in custody was a runner of contraband named La Joncière, the merit of whose discovery and arrest was due to l'Éveillé; and indeed, the name of this prisoner more closely resembled the original than any of the others. A second was a certain La Jonquille, a sergeant in the *Gardes-Françaises*; he had been discovered in a house of evil reputation, and there he had been arrested, falling a victim to a momentary lapse on his own part and to a slight mistake on the part of the Abbé's spies. A third, who rejoiced in the name of La Jupinière, was a footman in a gentleman's family; but unfortunately for him, the hall-porter was addicted to stuttering, and the spy, in his anxiety to distinguish himself, was easily persuaded that he had heard the name of La Jonquière pronounced where the porter had intended to say La Jupinière.

Ten persons had already been laid by the heels, although only half the force of police-agents engaged in the search had yet returned; it seemed likely, therefore, that the business of arresting unfortunate people whose names were in any degree suggestive of the real one would go on merrily until all its verbal analogies had been passed under review. Hence Dubois, notwithstanding his good-humour, was cursing his agents in choice terms, in order that his powers of vituperation might not become atrophied from want of practice. When he heard Tapin's report he rubbed his nose with great vigour—a good sign with him.—“Well,” said he, “so you think you have found the real La Jonquière, do you?”

“Yes, Monseigneur.”

“And his name really is La Jonquière?”

“Yes, Monseigneur.”

“L-a, La; J-o-n, Jon; q-u-i-è-r-e,

quière; La Jonquière?” continued Dubois, spelling the word.

“La Jon-quière,” repeated M. Tapin with conviction.

“A Captain?”

“Yes, Monseigneur.”

“A real Captain?”

“I've seen his uniform.”

This evidence appeared to Dubois sufficient so far as the officer's grade was concerned, but not for his identity.

“Very well,” he said. “And what is he doing?”

“He is waiting; and to pass the time he drinks.”

“That sounds satisfactory. Waiting and drinking, eh?”

“And drinking,” repeated the police-agent.

“But does he *pay*?” asked Dubois, evidently attaching great importance to this last question.

“He pays up like a good 'un, Monseigneur.”

“Excellent!” said Dubois. “Tapin, my man, you are a jewel.”

“Monseigneur, you flatter me,” said the police-agent, modestly. “Really, it is very simple; if he did not pay, he could not be dangerous.”

We have already had occasion to remark that Tapin was a man whose mind was governed by the strict rules of logic. In appreciation of his acumen, Dubois made him a present of ten louis; then after giving him fresh orders, he left word with his secretary, for the information of his emissaries as they should arrive, that, his collection of objects in the “Jonquière” style being now tolerably complete, they might abandon the search for further specimens. After a hasty toilet, he betook himself on foot towards the Rue des Bourdonnais.

Early that morning Messire Voyer d'Argenson had placed at Dubois' disposal half-a-dozen of his fellows, disguised as Gardes-Françaises. According to instructions, three of these men had gone on in front of Dubois, whilst the other three were to follow later.

We have now to say a few words with regard to the inn, to the interior of which the reader is about to be introduced.

The *Muid d'Amour* Inn, as we have said, was at the same time both an inn and a tavern. The rooms occupied by the inn guests were on the first floor, and the ground floor was devoted to the

accommodation of casual customers in need of refreshment. The principal room on the ground floor, namely, the common-room of the tavern, contained four oaken tables, an indefinite number of stools and, in accordance with immemorial tavern-tradition, striped red-and-white curtains. Benches were ranged round the walls; and rows of well-polished glasses gleamed upon the buffet. The walls were decorated with pictures, framed in gilt mouldings, some of which represented various episodes in the protracted career of the Wandering Jew, and others the trial and execution of Duchaufour. In order to complete the description, we have but to add that this attractive pot-house, dingy with the smoke of countless pipes, exhaled a most ancient and nauseating reek of vile tobacco which caught the unseasoned visitor by the throat as he entered.

The presiding genius of this respectable establishment was a coarse-looking, red-faced man of thirty-five or forty, mine host of the *Muid d'Amour*. His only daughter, a white-faced child of twelve or fourteen years, was learning, under the paternal direction, the management of the business which no doubt would devolve upon her at some future day. In the adjoining kitchen an aproned youth bent over the stove, whence proceeded a pungent and pleasing odour of devilled kidneys.

As yet the tavern was empty of customers; but as the clock struck the hour of one, a man in the uniform of the *Garde-Française* entered and, coming to a halt within the doorway, muttered to himself—"Rue des Bourdonnais, at the sign of the *Muid d'Amour*,—in the general room, at the table on the left—sit down and wait."

In accordance with these directions, the worthy defender of his country, whistling a warlike tune and twisting his moustache in the approved military fashion, betook himself to the spot indicated. He had scarcely seated himself and raised his fist in order to bang the table—a sign which, in the universal language of taverns, indicates a desire for refreshment—when a second man, clothed in the same uniform, crossed the threshold. Halting in his turn, his lips moved as though he were repeating some formula; then, after hesitating a moment, he crossed the room and took a seat beside

the other. The two soldiers regarded each other steadily, and each at the same moment gave vent to an exclamation.

"Halloa! Grippart, you here?" said one.

"Ah! it's you, L'Enlevant," said the other.

"What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing?"

"I don't know at all."

"Nor I."

"Then you have come here——"

"Acting under orders from the Department."

"Why, so am I!"

"Then you are waiting for——?"

"Yes; for a man who is to come in."

"Who will give the watch-word——"

"Right. And when you hear the watch-word——?"

"I'm ordered to obey the man as if he were Tapin himself."

"Right—right! And they tipped me a pistole for drinks in the meantime."

"They gave me a pistole too, but they didn't tell me I might drink it."

"When in doubt——?"

"'When in doubt play a trump,' says the book; and just now, I take it, that means a drink. Therefore drink it is!"

"Right again. What will you take?"

The speaker thumped the table to attract the host's attention; needlessly, however, for the host, having observed the arrival of customers—and recognising the amateur warriors in their bearing, was standing by the table, heels together, his hand raised to his greasy cap in the correct attitude of salute. Mine host of the *Muid d'Amour* was evidently somewhat of a wag.

"Wine!" shouted the two militiamen in chorus.

"And make it Orléans," added one of them. "It's a rough wine, and I like it that way."

"Gentlemen," replied the host with a villainous smile, "I keep no such thing as rough wine, but it's none the worse for that, I can tell you." So saying, he produced a bottle already uncorked. His two customers filled their glasses and drank. When they replaced them on the table the expression on their faces, though different, indicated that their opinions were unanimous.

"Not rough, you say? What the devil would you call it, then? Why, it's like swallowing fish-hooks!"

"Ah! it's something like a wine, gentlemen," said the host.

"It's a pity it ha'n't got a dash more vinegar in it," said the second warrior, sarcastically.

The host smiled like a man who appreciates a pleasantry. "Would you like to try another sort?" he asked.

"When we want it, we'll call for it."

The host nodded, and, taking the hint, left the two soldiers to their own devices.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Grippart, when the landlord was out of earshot, "if you knew a bit more than you have spoken of so far."

"Well, I do happen to know it's on account of Captain Something-or-other," replied his companion.

"Yes, that's right; but I suppose if we have to arrest the Captain they will send us a reinforcement?"

"No doubt about it, I should say. Only two against one—the odds are too short."

"But don't forget there's the man with the watch-word. He's our reinforcement."

"I'd sooner there were two, and good 'uns at that. Ah! what's that? I fancy I hear something."

"Yes; somebody is coming downstairs."

"*Sh!*"

"Mum's the word!" And the two Gardes-Françaises, with greater heed for the watch-word than if they had been genuine soldiers, filled up their glasses and drank, each keeping a sharp but furtive eye upon the stairs.

The two observers had not been mistaken. The staircase (which we forgot to mention in our inventory, and which skirted the wall) creaked beneath a tolerably respectable weight, and the guests who at that moment occupied the common room were enabled to observe first of all the legs, then the body, and finally the head of the person descending. The legs were encased in well-stretched silken hose and kerseymere breeches; the body in a blue coat; and the head was ornamented with a three-cornered hat rakishly tilted over one ear. An eye less carefully trained than that of a police-agent would have had little difficulty in recognising a captain by these outward signs; and moreover his epaulettes and sword left no possible

doubt as to the grade in the service of the man who wore them.

This captain, who was no other than Captain La Jonquière, was a man of five feet two, somewhat stout of build, yet active withal. His keen, roving glance took in the surroundings with marvellous discernment: it seemed as though he smoked the spy beneath the uniform of the Gardes-Françaises, for immediately on entering the room he turned his back upon the convivial pair and began talking to the landlord in a manner which appeared significant.

"In truth," said the Captain, "I had intended dining here—and the smell of those kidneys is deuced inviting—but a few bucks who understand what dining means are expecting me at the *Galoubet de Paphos*. Ha! by-the-way, if anybody should call for me—I'm expecting a young fellow from my part of the country to collect a little matter of a hundred pistoles—tell him I could wait no longer. If he should come, and give you his name, tell him I shall be back in an hour, and he can wait."

"Very well, Captain," said the landlord.

"Some more wine!" cried one of the Gardes.

"H'm," muttered the Captain, throwing a careless glance towards the drinkers, "some soldiers here who hold an epaulette in but slight respect." Then turning once more to the host—"Serve these gentlemen," he said. "You see they are in a hurry."

"Not at all," replied one of them, rising from his seat with belated courtesy, "except by your Honour's leave."

"By all means, by all means," said La Jonquière with a pleasant smile on his lips, although he felt much inclined to thrash the two rascals whose faces displeased him seriously. He thought better of it, however, and made a move towards the door.

"But, Captain, you haven't told me the name of the gentleman you expect to call for you," said the landlord, stopping him.

La Jonquière hesitated. A passably martial gesture of one of the Gardes, who crossed one leg over the other and twirled his moustache with easy grace, in a certain measure restored the Captain's confidence. He was further reassured by observing the other man dancing a corks-

on the tip of his finger with the dexterity apparently acquired by long practice in barracks, and at the same time imitating with his mouth the sound of a bottle of champagne being opened. "Monsieur le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay," said the Captain, replying to the landlord's question.

"Gaston de Chanlay," repeated the host. "Stop a moment—the deuce!—suppose I were to forget it. Gaston—Gaston; very good so far—I shall remember that by thinking of 'Gascon.' Chanlay; good again; I shall think of chandelier."

"Precisely," replied La Jonquière, with gravity. "Gascon de Chandelier. Really I should recommend you to open a school for memory-training, and, if you based your method upon such infallible principles, you couldn't fail to make a fortune."

The landlord received the compliment with a smile; and Captain La Jonquière went out, after glancing round into the street as though observing the weather, though in reality he was warily taking observations of the doorways and corners of adjacent houses. He had scarcely walked a hundred yards along the Rue Saint-Honoré, towards which he had bent his steps, when Dubois appeared, and, after looking through the window, entered the tavern. He had passed the Captain on the way; but having never previously set eyes upon that important personage, had naturally remained unaware of his identity.

Dubois entered boldly, his hand to his shabby hat. He wore a grey coat, sad-coloured breeches, and his hose in untidy rucks. In a word, his costume was exactly that of a country shopkeeper.

CHAPTER XIV

M. MOUTONNET, DRAPER AND CLOTHIER,
OF SAINT GERMAIN-EN-LAYE

HAVING cast a rapid glance upon the two Gardes-Françaises who were drinking in the corner, Dubois at once addressed himself to the landlord, who was waddling deviously across the

room littered with benches and stools, and kicking aside the corks which strewed the floor. "Monsieur," said he, in a conciliatory tone, "I understand M. le Capitaine La Jonquière lives here. I should like to speak to him, if I may."

"Oh, you want to speak to Captain La Jonquière, do you?" said the landlord, eyeing the new arrival from top to toe.

"Yes, if I may, I should like to speak to him," replied Dubois.

"Are you sure the man you want to see is lodging here?" asked the host, who felt doubtful if the man before him was the one whom the Captain expected.

"I think so," replied Dubois, with diffidence.

"A short, stout man?"

"That is right."

"A tidy drinker?"

"That is the man."

"And precious handy with his stick if his orders are not attended to on the instant?"

"Oh, yes; that's Captain La Jonquière to a hair."

"You know him, then?"

"Know him? I've never set eyes on him," said Dubois.

"Ah, of course you don't; or you would have seen him as he passed you at the door."

"What! has he gone out?" asked Dubois, with ill-concealed annoyance. "Much obliged, I'm sure." Instantly aware that he had made a false move, he hastened to cover it by assuming his most honied smile.

"Good Lord, yes!" said the host. "Five minutes ago."

"But no doubt he will soon return?"

"I expect him back in an hour."

"Have you any objection to my waiting, sir?"

"Not the least, providing you take something for the good of the house."

Dubois understood the euphuism. "Bring me some cherries in brandy," said he. "I never drink wine between meals."

The two soldiers exchanged a smile of undisguised contempt. The landlord bustled to execute the order. When the little glass containing the cherries was set before him, Dubois remarked, "Ah! you have only given me five. At Saint-Germain-en-Laye I always get six."

"Very likely, sir," replied the host,

"but they don't have to pay any duties on 'em there."

"Quite right, quite right," said Dubois. "I was forgetting the duties—you must excuse me, sir." He began nibbling a cherry, and, in spite of his self-control, could not avoid making a wry face. The landlord, who was watching his customer narrowly, observed the grimace, and indulged in a smile of satisfaction.

"And where did you say the Captain lodges?" asked Dubois, as though by way of saying something.

"That's the door of his room, over there," said the host. "He always fancies a room on the ground floor."

"With good reason," thought Dubois. "The windows give convenient access to the street."

"And his other door leads straight into the Rue des Deux Boules."

"Does it?" said Dubois, with child-like interest. "Yes, I daresay that would be very convenient. But I should think he finds it rather noisy."

"Oh, well, he has another room upstairs. Sometimes he sleeps in one and sometimes in the other."

"Like Dionysius the tyrant," commented Dubois, unable to refrain from classical allusion.

"Say it again," said the landlord, mystified.

Dubois perceived that he had made another blunder, and bit his lip with vexation. At that moment, luckily, one of the Gardes-Françaises created a diversion by calling for wine; and the host, always prompt at the call of duty, dodged out of the room to fetch it. Dubois followed him with his eyes; then, turning to the two drinkers—"Much obliged to you," he said.

"What's the matter with you, my good man?" said L'Enlevant superciliously.

"*France and the Regent*," was the unexpected answer.

"The watchword!" cried the imitation warriors, springing to their feet.

"Into that room with you!" said Dubois, pointing to La Jonquière's apartment. "Have the door open which leads to the Rue des Deux Boules, and hide yourselves under the table—in the cupboard—behind a curtain—wherever you please. Only, if I see so much as a whisker showing when I enter the room, I'll dock your pay for six months!"

The fellows carefully drained their

glasses, like wise men, not disdainful of creature comforts; then slipped into the room indicated.

Noticing that they had neglected to pay for their refreshment Dubois threw a twelve-sou piece upon the table. He then hastened to open the window in order to speak to the driver seated on the box of a coach which was stationed outside.—"L'Éveillé," he said, "bring the carriage round to the little door in the Rue des Deux Boules, and tell Tapin to come up as soon as he hears me tap on the window. He'll know what he has to do. Off with you!" He closed the window, and next moment heard the sound of the carriage moving away. Only just in time, for the bustling landlord immediately re-entered the room. At the first glance he noticed the absence of the Gardes-Françaises.

Halloa!" he exclaimed. "What's become of those two men?"

"Oh!" replied Dubois, "a sergeant came and tapped at the door and called them away."

"But they've gone away without paying!" cried the host.

"No, look there; they have left a twelve-sou piece on the table."

"Twelve sous! what the devil!" cried the indignant host. "The price of my Orléans wine is eight sous a bottle."

"Ah, very likely they thought you would make a little reduction for soldiers," said Dubois.

"Oh! well," said the landlord, who no doubt found the reduction reasonable and was easily consoled. "Oh, well, it's not a dead loss, anyway; and we get plenty of them in our business."

"Fortunately, you have nothing of the sort to fear with Captain La Jonquière!" rejoined Dubois.

"You're right; and I don't mind saying he's a first-rate lodger—he plunks his money down and never haggles about the price. A perfect gentleman, he is. True, he grumbles about everything."

"Does he really?" said Dubois. "I suppose it's a sort of mania with him."

"You've taken the word out of my mouth—I was just going to say *mania*. That's it, exactly."

"It gives me great pleasure to hear you speak so well of the Captain's business-habits," said Dubois.

"Have you come here to collect some money?" asked the landlord. "He told

me he was expecting somebody to whom he owed a hundred pistoles."

"On the contrary," replied Dubois, "I am bringing him fifty louis."

"Fifty louis! *Peste!* that's a nice little sum. I must have misunderstood him; instead of having to pay, he had the money to receive. Might your name be the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay, if you'll excuse me?"

"Ah! so he is expecting the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay?" cried Dubois, unable to conceal his joy.

"That's what he told me, at any rate," replied the landlord, somewhat surprised at the eagerness shown by the nibbler of cherries, who was still manfully wrestling with the loathsome morsels and grimacing like a monkey who unexpectedly finds himself chewing a bitter almond.—"And I asked you if that was your name."

"No, sir; I don't belong to the privileged class. My name is Moutonnet simply."

"Privileged class be hanged! They aren't no better than they should be," said the host, wagging his head confidentially. "A man may be called Moutonnet and yet perhaps be a very honest man."

"Yes, Moutonnet," continued Dubois, nodding his approval of the landlord's sentiments; "Moutonnet, draper, St. Germain-en-Laye."

"And you say you have fifty louis to pay the Captain?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dubois, courageously swallowing the juice after having conscientiously eaten the cherries. "It's a queer thing, but I was turning over my father's old ledgers the other day, and I found an entry on the credit side showing that he owed fifty louis to Captain La Jonquière's father. So I set to work and gave myself no rest until I found the son, after I discovered that the father was dead."

"Well, I must say, M. Moutonnet," said the landlord, opening wide eyes of astonishment at this miracle of business probity, "I must say we don't find many such men as you."

"We are all the same, from father to son—from Moutonnet to Moutonnet. But, on the other hand, when anybody owes *us* money, we are *pitiless!*" Dubois leaned back and stared fiercely at the landlord as though challenging

him to deny it. Finding the landlord disinclined to protest, he continued,—
"For example, there was a man—a gentleman he called himself—owed the firm of Moutonnet & Son a hundred and sixty livres. Very well, then. My grandfather had him sent to prison, and there he stayed, sir, for three generations of Moutonnets; and what's more, he died there. Yes, sir, it was about a fortnight ago I made up the account—the rascal cost us, during the thirty years he was in prison, twelve thousand livres. No matter; it was the principle of the thing—the *principle*, sir! . . . But I'm afraid I am keeping you," said Dubois, who had been watching the doorway out of the corner of his eye, and had that moment observed a shadow which bore some resemblance to that of the Captain. "Excuse me for troubling you with these trifles which probably do not interest you. Here comes a fresh customer."

"Ah! here's the very person you want," said the landlord. "Captain, here is somebody waiting to see you."

The Captain had not entirely dismissed his suspicions of the morning. He fancied he had noticed in the street a number of unaccustomed faces, whose appearance struck him as not altogether conducive to tranquillity of mind; so he entered the tavern with much cautious circumspection. His first glance was directed towards the corner where he had left the Gardes-Françaises. Finding the place vacant, he was somewhat reassured. Next Dubois fell under his mistrustful scrutiny, and evidently caused him some disquietude. But those people who suffer from an uneasy conscience, generally gain courage to face risks from the very excess of their fears, or rather, familiarity with fear ends by blunting their perception of it. La Jonquière was no exception to the rule. Moreover, the decent appearance of the draper from Saint-Germain-en-Laye tended to lull his suspicions, and he condescended to acknowledge that respectable tradesman's presence by a nod. Dubois, on his side, returned the courtesy with interest, bowing to the Captain with the utmost politeness.

La Jonquière turned to the landlord and enquired if the person whom he expected had called.

"Only this gentleman here," replied

the worthy host. "But I don't think you will lose anything by the exchange: the other one was coming to collect a hundred pistoles, but this gentleman has brought you fifty louis."

The Captain looked at Dubois in surprise, but the latter bore his gaze with admirable fortitude, moulding his features into an expression as amiably vacant as they were capable of assuming. The Captain was not altogether taken in by Dubois' appearance, but his judgment was confused by the story which the latter repeated with admirably artistic verisimilitude. Rendered amiable by the unlooked-for but welcome addition to his resources—for the gifts of Fortune are generally more esteemed than those benefits which have been duly earned—La Jonquière smiled pleasantly upon the good draper. When he began to consider the man's noble conduct in searching high and low in order to find a creditor who was entirely unaware of any sum owing to him, the Captain began to feel desirous of rendering some graceful acknowledgment of it; he therefore called to the landlord for a bottle of Spanish wine and invited Dubois to crack it with him in his own room. To pick up his hat which was lying on a chair, Dubois had occasion to pass the window; and whilst La Jonquière was in conversation with the landlord, he drummed gently upon the pane. The Captain turned and politely indicated the door of his room.

"Thank you, sir," said Dubois, with a deprecatory smile. "If you are quite sure I shall not be in the way, I shall be much honoured."

"Not at all, not at all," said the Captain affably. "There is a pleasant outlook; we can watch the passers-by while we are drinking. Some fine women live in the Rue des Bourdonnais, let me tell you. Aha! that makes you smile, you dog, eh?"

"Aha!" echoed Dubois, absently rubbing his nose—a characteristic gesture. It was a blunder; in any district less remote from the Palais-Royal it would have been fatal to the success of his enterprise; but in the Rue des Bourdonnais it passed unnoticed. He followed the Captain, who in his turn followed the landlord, the bottles of wine heading the procession. Bringing up the rear, Dubois had an opportunity of

passing a signal to Tapin, who, accompanied by two of his men, was just entering the tavern. Once inside the Captain's room, the draper, like the well-mannered bourgeois he evidently was, closed the door behind him.

The police-agent's two jackals understood their duty. Their first care was to screen the window by drawing the curtains, whilst Tapin stationed himself beside the door of La Jonquière's room in such a position that when the door opened he would be concealed behind it. Next moment the landlord reappeared; he had served the Captain and M. Moutonnet to their satisfaction, and also to his own, for La Jonquière, who never required credit, had put down a crown piece in payment. The methodical hotel-keeper was now about to enter the transaction in his account-book and to lock up the money in the till. But he had scarcely had time to close the door behind him, when Tapin, seizing the opportunity, pounced upon him like a cat, deftly bandaged his mouth with a kerchief, pulled his stocking-cap down over his face and carried him off bodily into a second *fiacre* standing precisely opposite the door. At the same moment one of the assistants picked up the little girl who was busy beating eggs, whilst the other attended to the cook, whom he carried off wrapped up like a mummy in a table-cloth and still firmly grasping the handle of his frying-pan. In the twinkling of an eye the landlord, his daughter and the gravy-spoiler—if we may be permitted to make use of a term consecrated alike by usage and by truth—escorted by the two bailiffs, were rolling away in the direction of Saint-Lazare at too swift a pace, and behind horses too mettlesome, to permit the belief that the vehicle was really and truly a hired *fiacre*.

With the instinct of an accomplished detective, Tapin began rummaging in the cupboard behind the kitchen door, whence he extracted a cotton cap, jacket and apron. Then beckoning to an idler who was admiring his reflection in the window outside, he quickly transformed him into a fairly good imitation of a hotel-keeper's assistant. A violent uproar broke out in the next room as of a table upset and breaking bottles and glasses, accompanied with a stamping of heavy boots and a furious volley of oaths. A clatter as of a naked sword dashed

upon the tiled floor, and then complete silence.

After a short interval, the rumbling of a fiacre departing by the Rue des Deux-Boules set the house shaking.

The police-agent, who had been listening attentively, ready to rush into the next room, carving-knife in hand, in order to render assistance, allowed his features to relax in a pleased smile.—"Good!" he cried. "That job's settled."

"None too soon, neither," said the improvised publican. "Look out, Master; here comes a customer."

CHAPTER XV

PROOFS OF IDENTITY

AT first Tapin thought it might be the Chevalier Gaston de Chanley, but he was mistaken. The customer who entered the tavern was a woman who wanted a pint of wine.

"What's happened to poor M. Bourguignon?" she asked. "I just saw him driven away in a coach with his white ap on his head."

"Ah! my dear Madame," replied Tapin, "such a sad misfortune! Who could ever have expected it! The poor fellow, while standing there talking to me just as usual, suddenly fell down in an apoplectic fit."

"Gracious alive! you don't say so!"

"It is only too true," said the agent. And it only shows," he went on, piously raising his eyes to the ceiling, "it only shows, my dear Madame, that man is but mortal—here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"But the little girl too—why did they take her away?"

"To attend to her father. It is her duty."

"But the cook and all?" continued the inquisitive beldame whose thirst for information was not yet satisfied.

"They must have someone to cook for them, don't you see, and whom could they have better?"

"Well, well, to think of that now! I was just looking out of the door and I

see the carriage drive up, and I couldn't think what was the matter. So I says to myself, 'I'll just run in and buy a pint of wine,—though not exactly wanting it, as you might say—and then I'll find out what's wrong. That's only neighbourly.'"

"Quite right, my dear Madame. And now you know all about it."

"Yes; but who might you be, young man?"

"Oh, my name is Lafitte, and I am poor Bourguignon's cousin. I happened to come up from the country this morning to pay him a visit and to tell him all the news about the family. It was the sudden joy of seeing me, I suppose,—he had a stroke—and before you could say Knife it was all over with him. Ask Grabigeon there," continued the resourceful rascal, pointing to his assistant, who was finishing the preparation of the omelette which the landlord's daughter had begun.

"Oh! dear me, yes, it all happened just as M. Lafitte has said," replied Grabigeon, stemming the torrent of his tears with the handle of his spoon.

"Poor M. Bourguignon! So then you think the only thing to do is to pray for his soul?"

"We should always do well to pray," replied Tapin solemnly.

"Yes, to be sure, and so I will, surely. Stop a moment, though—mind you give me good measure now, young man."

The self-styled cousin of the landlord nodded, and measured out the wine with the deftness of an experienced publican. Dexterity in gauging the liquid was a simple matter, seeing that it only meant generosity with other people's goods. Bourguignon would have bellowed with grief and indignation, could he have seen the quantity of his choice Mâcon which his deputy seemed to consider a fair equivalent for two sous.

"Well now, I'll just pop round and tell the neighbours," continued the dame. "They were beginning to be a bit upset-like. And I promise you you shan't lose my custom, M. Lafitte; and what's more, if you were not M. Bourguignon's cousin, I'd just tell you what I think about him."

"You may tell me, neighbour. It won't offend me a bit."

"Well, then, he's been cheating me all ends up. This here jug what you've

filled right up for two sous, he used not to quite fill it for four sous."

"Really, you surprise me!" said Tapin.

"Yes, M. Lafitte; but it's quite right what they say—there is justice in heaven if there is no justice here below. It is a merciful dispensation, as you might say, that you are here to carry on the business."

"No doubt," muttered the upright publican to himself. "A merciful dispensation for the customers." He hastened to get rid of the woman, for he was afraid if the visitor he expected should arrive, all these explanations might, to a newcomer, seem suspicious. Indeed, she was scarcely clear of the premises when, simultaneously with the clock striking half-past two, the street-door opened and a young man entered, irreproachable as to his style, wearing a blue coat flecked with snow."

"Is this the *Muid d'Amour* Inn?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And does Captain La Jonquière lodge here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he within at the present moment?"

"Yes, sir; he has just returned."

"Well, have the goodness to let him know that M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay is here."

Tapin, after offering the Chevalier a chair, which the latter declined, entered La Jonquière's room.

Gaston shook off the snow which clung to his boots, wiped the snow-flakes from his cloak, and began inspecting the pictures on the wall with the languid curiosity of a man who is obliged to wait. He was very far from suspecting that within a yard of him were three or four good blades which, at a single nod from the landlord, to all appearance so obliging and subservient, would leap from their sheaths to be plunged into his breast.

At the end of five minutes the landlord returned. Leaving the door open in order to indicate the way, he announced,—"M. le Capitaine La Jonquière is awaiting M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

Gaston walked into the adjoining room—the apartment of a strict disciplinarian, where everything was arranged with conspicuous neatness. He found a man

seated, whom the landlord introduced as Captain La Jonquière. Without being much of a physiognomist, it struck Gaston that the Captain was no very truculent fire-eater—unless, indeed, he contrived to conceal his real disposition with remarkable ability. A little, dried-up man with keen eyes and a richly-tinted nose, wearing an old and ill-fitting uniform, which appeared to cause him some inconvenience, and trussed up to a sword almost as long as himself—such was the appearance presented by the formidable Captain whom the Marquis de Pontcalec and the other conspirators had recommended to Gaston's most courteous and considerate treatment.—"Ugly, and looks like a Churchwarden," was Gaston's silent comment. Then, as the little man rose to receive him,—“Have I the honour of speaking to Captain La Jonquière?” he asked.

"Right, sir, right," replied Dubois, masquerading as a warrior. Then, returning Gaston's salute,—“And so it is the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay who is so good as to pay me a visit?”

"Yes, Captain," replied Gaston.

"Have you the signs of recognition agreed upon?" asked the imitation La Jonquière.

"Here is my half of the gold piece."

"And here is the other half," said Dubois. They tried the two, and found them to fit exactly.

"And now," said Gaston, "let us see the papers." He drew from his pocket the strangely-folded paper upon which was written the name of Captain La Jonquière. At the same time Dubois produced a similar paper bearing the name of the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay: both were portions of the same piece of paper and one torn edge of each fitted the other perfectly.—“That is satisfactory,” said Gaston. “Now the portfolios.”

The two portfolios were compared; they were found to be precisely similar, and each of them, though quite new, contained an almanack of the year 1700—that is to say nineteen years old. This was a further precaution which had been adopted in order to obviate any possibility of imitation. As it happened, Dubois was under no necessity of imitating, since he had found all that he required on the person of La Jonquière and, with his diabolical sagacity, ha

guessed all and laid his plans accordingly.

"And now, sir—?" said Gaston.

"Now," rejoined Dubois, "we can discuss our little business. That is what you mean to say, eh?"

"As you say. But, first of all, are we quite alone here?"

"As much as if we were in the middle of the Sahara."

"Then let us sit down and talk."

"Agreed. Say on, Chevalier." The two men seated themselves at the table, upon which stood a bottle of sherry and a couple of glasses. Dubois filled one, and was about to pour into the other, but was checked by the Chevalier's upraised hand.—"*Peste!*" said Dubois to himself, "he is thin and abstemious. It was the great Cæsar who distrusted men with those two qualities, and he was not far wrong. Brutus and Cassius were examples in point."

Gaston appeared to be reflecting. From time to time he turned upon Dubois a glance of profound scrutiny which the latter, gracefully sipping his wine, supported with perfect freedom from embarrassment.

"Captain," began Gaston after a prolonged pause, "it has occurred to me that in a matter like the present, wherein each of us risks his neck, it would be only proper, before we go any farther, that each of us should learn something of the other's antecedents by way of confirming our mutual confidence. I am indebted to Talhouët, Du Couëdic and Pontcalec for my introduction to you: my name and condition you know already: for the rest, I was brought up under the care of a brother whose animus against the Regent was the result of personal grievances. This animosity I share; hence it naturally befell that when, close upon three years ago, the league was formed among the nobility of Brittany, I joined the conspiracy. Recently I was chosen by the chiefs in Brittany to be sent to Paris in order to put myself in touch with the malcontents in the capital and receive instructions from the Baron de Valef, who has arrived from Spain. These instructions I am required to transmit to the Duc d'Olivarez, agent in Paris of his Catholic Majesty, and to obtain from him an expression of his concurrence."

"Very good. And what part is Cap-

tain La Jonquière to play in all this?" Dubois asked the question as though it were he who doubted the other's good faith and desired to put it to the test.

"It is he who will undertake to present me to the Duc d'Olivarez. I arrived in Paris two hours ago and went to call upon M. de Valef first of all. Thence I came directly to you. And now, sir, you know as much about me as I know myself."

Dubois checked each of the Chevalier's statements with a nod, whilst his face wore an expression of mistrustful caution appropriate to the part he was acting. When Gaston had concluded: "For my part, Chevalier, I am free to confess," he began, leaning back with martial grace in his chair and assuming an attitude full of repose, "that my history is not only considerably longer than yours, but also more replete with incident. Still, if you would like to hear it, I shall make it a point of duty to satisfy you."

Gaston made a slight inclination in acknowledgment of his companion's courtesy.—"To be well acquainted with one another is, I repeat, one of the prime necessities of the situation for men in our position, Captain."

"Well," said Dubois, "my name is La Jonquière, as you know, and I hold the grade of Captain. My father was, like myself, a free-lance—a trade at which any amount of glory is to be acquired, but as a rule, devilish little money. Therefore you will not be surprised to learn that my glorious parent, having pillaged his last farmhouse and departed this life, left nothing to his son beside his rapier and uniform. I girded on the one, which was a trifle long, and donned the other, which was a trifle large. Ever since," continued Dubois, grasping a large handful of his coat in order to draw attention to its singular roominess—a fact which the Chevalier could well observe without any demonstration—"ever since that time I have retained the habit of allowing myself plenty of elbow-room inside my clothes."

Gaston nodded as though to assure the Captain that, in spite of his own prejudice in favour of more closely-fitting garments, he desired to disclaim the idea of calling in question the gallant officer's perfect good taste in matters sartorial.

"Thanks to my good looks and soldierly bearing," continued Dubois, "I

was permitted to join the Royal Italians who, for reasons of economy—and also owing to the fact that Italy was no longer in our hands—were temporarily recruiting in France. In that gallant regiment I held the distinguished rank of private. As chance would have it, upon the eve of the battle of Malplaquet, I had a slight difference with my sergeant respecting an order which he gave me with his stick raised, instead of pointing it to the ground as would have been proper."

"Pardon me," said Gaston, "but I don't quite see in what way that could affect the order he was giving you."

"It made this difference: in lowering his stick he was clumsy enough to catch it in my headgear, which fell on the ground. This brought about a little duel between us, in which I had occasion to insert a considerable length of my blade between his ribs. Now, as I should certainly have been shot had I been foolish enough to wait for arrest, I gave myself the word of command: 'By the left,—turn! Quick — march!' — And next morning when I woke I found myself—devil seize me if I know how it came about!—in the midst of Marlborough's army."

"You mean to say, you deserted," interposed Gaston, smiling.

"Thereby following the example set by such heroes as Coriolanus and the great Condé, which appeared to me ample vindication of my conduct at the tribunal of posterity. . . . Well, then, as I was saying, I took part in the battle—I tell you this, since we ought to be entirely frank with each other—I took part, I say, in the battle of Malplaquet; only, instead of being on one side of the brook, I found myself on the other—instead of having my back to the village, I was facing it. I've a shrewd suspicion that the change was a fortunate one for your humble servant: the Royal Italians left eight hundred men on the field, my company being cut to pieces and the man who shared my tent cut in halves by one of the seventeen thousand cannonballs fired in the course of that engagement. The illustrious Marlborough was so charmed by the glorious conduct of my late regiment that he made me an ensign upon the field of battle. With as powerful a protector I ought to have gone far; but his lady wife — may she be eter-

nally confounded! was awkward enough to spill some water over Queen Anne's dress, and this dire calamity, as no doubt you are aware, changed the entire aspect of European politics. In the resulting upheaval I was left without other protection than my own personal merit and the enemies I had gained thereby."

"What was your next move?" asked Gaston, who could not help feeling a certain amount of interest in the adventurous career of the supposed captain.

"Well, as I say, I was in a bit of a corner, and was obliged, much against my will, to seek service in the army of his Catholic Majesty, who — to his honour be it spoken—was graciously pleased to accede to my request. In three years' time I had risen to the rank of Captain; but out of our nominal pay of thirty reals a day they kept back twenty—never failing at the same time to impress upon us how deeply we ought to consider ourselves honoured by the condescension of the King of Spain in borrowing our money. But as this form of investment appeared to lack security, I asked leave of my colonel to quit the service of his Catholic Majesty and to return to my beloved country; and requested him at the same time to provide me with a written testimonial of sorts in order to obviate any possible unpleasantness arising out of that Malplaquet affair. The colonel referred me to his Excellency the Prince of Cellamare, who, observing my natural propensity to obey orders without question—I mean, of course, orders transmitted with due regard to my dignity and accompanied with the right sort of music—found employment for my talents in the famous conspiracy to which his name is attached. However, the plot was blown upon by La Fillon, as I dare say you have heard, and by a starveling quill-driver named Buvat. The consequence was, the whole thing collapsed. But his Highness, wisely considering that a matter which is put off for a time is not necessarily done with, recommended me to his successor, to whom, as I venture to hope, my poor services may be of some small utility, and to whom I shall always remain indebted for the opportunity afforded me of making the acquaintance of so accomplished a Cavalier as yourself. Pray command

me, Chevalier, as your very humble and obedient servant."

"Thank you, Captain, but all I have to request at present is that you will be good enough to present me to the Duke of Olivarez. To him alone I am authorized to speak openly, and to him also I have to hand over the despatches from the Baron de Valf. I shall follow these instructions to the letter; and therefore I will trespass upon you only so far as to beg you to present me to his Excellency."

"Why, of course I will, Chevalier—this very day," replied Dubois, who appeared to have laid his plans. "Within the hour if you wish it—or if necessary in ten minutes."

"The sooner the better."

"Stop a moment," said Dubois; "I was going a little too fast when I said an hour. In Paris you can never be sure of anything: very likely his Excellency doesn't know of your arrival, and perhaps we may not find him at home."

"Ah! of course. Well, I will wait."

"It might even happen that I shall be prevented from returning to fetch you."

"How is that?"

"You ask 'how!' Confound it, Chevalier, it's easy to see this is your first visit to Paris!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say, sir, that in Paris there are three distinct services of police,—though they understand well enough how to combine when it is a question of worrying some poor inoffensive devil who merely wishes to upset the existing order of things and substitute fresh. As I say, there are three distinct bodies: firstly, the Regent's police, who are not remarkably formidable. Secondly, those controlled by Messire Voyer d'Argenson—pooh! I don't give a damn for them,—except now and then, when their chief has been roughed up at the Convent of the Madeleine du Tresnel and has vented his spleen upon his lethargic underlings. The third are those of Dubois. Ah! that is another pair of shoes altogether. They are the very devil and all! Master Dubois is a great—"

"A great rascal!" Gaston interposed. "I do not need to be told that; I know it already."

Dubois nodded delightedly and grinned a simian grin.—"And in order to escape these police—?"

"Great prudence is necessary, Chevalier."

"Give me a few particulars, Captain, since you know more about it than I. As I have told you, I am entirely provincial."

"Well, in the first place it is important that we should not both lodge in the same hotel."

"The deuce it is!" replied Gaston, remembering the address he had given to Hélène. "That is rather a nuisance, for I have reasons for wishing to stay here."

"Oh, in that case, Chevalier, stay here by all means, and I will find rooms somewhere else. Take one of my two rooms, either this one or the one upstairs."

"Thanks. I should prefer this room."

"Good judge! Ground floor—window in one street—masked door to another street. Come, I see you are an observer, and we shall make something of you after all."

"To return to our business—" said the Chevalier."

"Ah, yes—business. What was I saying? Let me see—"

"You were saying you might be prevented from returning."

"To be sure; and in that case be very careful not to follow anybody who may call for you unless he can produce the tokens."

"By what tokens am I to recognize a person sent by you?"

"In the first place he will bring a letter from me."

"I do not know your handwriting."

"True. I will give you a specimen."

"Dubois took paper and pen and wrote the following lines:

"MONSIEUR LE CHEVALIER, — You may follow with perfect confidence the bearer of this letter. He has been deputed by me to lead you to the house where you will find awaiting you the Duke of Olivarez and CAPTAIN LA JONQUIÈRE.

Then handing the letter to Gaston,— "If anybody should call for you in my name," said Dubois, "he will give you a note similar to this."

"Will that be sufficient?"

"Not by a very long way: in addition to my autograph he will show you the broken coin, and, when you reach the house, you will ask him to produce the third token."

"And that is—?"

"The paper."

"Very well," said Gaston. "With these precautions it will be very hard if we allow ourselves to be caught. But in the meantime, what is my best course?"

"In the meantime, wait. You have no special occasion to go out to-day, I hope?"

"No."

"Well, then, you had better 'lie low' for a while—stay in the inn, where you will find everything you need. I will recommend you specially to the landlord."

"Thank you."

Dubois opened the door and called to Tapin—"Monsieur Lafitte, my good fellow, I wish to recommend to your best attention this gentleman, the Chevalier de Chanlay, who is taking over my room. You will attend to him as though he were myself." Then, closing the door behind him, he continued in a lower tone,—
"This fellow is worth his weight in gold, M. Tapin. Don't let him out of your sight for an instant, or your head shall answer for it."

CHAPTER XVI

HIS EXCELLENCY THE DUKE OF OLIVAREZ

IN dealing with matters which threatened the security of the Regent and of France Dubois was always notably lucky; and now, on quitting the Chevalier, he again had reason to felicitate himself upon the happy chance which had placed all the threads of the conspiracy within his grasp. As he was about to leave the tavern he noticed L'Éveill  , who, having superintended the spiriting away of the real La Jonqu  re, was comparing notes with his chief. Dubois signed to him to follow. When they were in the street, Dubois enquired with interest as to what had happened to the worthy Captain, and learned that, after being duly gagged and pinioned, he had been conducted to the Keep of Vincennes and thrust into a cell in order to prevent him from interfering with the plans of the Government. For the discouragement of revolutionary enterprise the system which prevailed at

that period was delightfully simple and most convenient for the Powers in authority.

Having been enlightened upon this important point, Dubois went on his way deep in thought. Only half the business was yet completed, and that the easier half. It now remained to induce the Regent to take an active interest in an affair such as he detested, namely, a case which involved the employment of political chicanery.

Dubois opened the campaign by enquiring as to the Regent's whereabouts and how he was occupied.

The Prince was in his studio, etching a copper plate in a bath of acid prepared for him by the chemist Humbert. In the same room Humbert himself was engaged in embalming an ibis by the method of the Egyptians, which he claimed to have re-discovered. At the same time a secretary was reading aloud certain letters in a cypher of which the Regent alone had the key. Suddenly, to the Regent's great astonishment—for he was unaccustomed to being disturbed in his private sanctum—the door was opened and a footman announced in a loud voice,—
"M. le Capitaine La Jonqu  re."

The Regent turned round sharply.—
"La Jonqu  re!" he said. "I don't know the name."

Humbert and the secretary exchanged glances of surprise at the intrusion of a stranger upon their employer's privacy.

A ferret-faced individual insinuated his absurd head round the half-opened door. For a moment the Regent failed to recognize Dubois in his extraordinary disguise, but the long, sharp nose which had not its match throughout the kingdom very soon betrayed the wily Minister. A look of intense amusement replaced that of annoyance and surprise on the Duke's face.

"What, is it you, Abb  ?" said his Highness, with a peal of laughter. "And pray what does this new disguise mean?"

"It means, Monseigneur, that the fox has changed his skin and become a lion.—Now, Mr. Chemist, and you, Mr. Secretary, have the kindness to stuff your birds and read your letters elsewhere."

"What's that for?" asked the Regent.
"Because I have to speak to your Highness on important business."

"To the devil with you and your busi-

ness! You are too late now. Come and see me to-morrow," said the Regent.

"Surely your Highness would not expose me to the dreadful necessity of wearing this detestable outfit till to-morrow! The annoyance would be the cause of my sudden death, and that would be an unmitigated nuisance. I should never recover from the shock."

"You must please yourself about that. You know I have decided to devote the rest of the day to amusement."

"So be it. I propose you amuse yourself by adopting a disguise also."

"Disguise myself! What do you mean, Dubois?" asked the Regent, thinking it was a question of one of his usual masquerades.

"Aha! Monsieur Alain, is your mouth beginning to water?"

"Come, tell me, what have you arranged?"

"Send away the chemist and the secretary first of all."

"You really mean it?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, very well, then." The Regent dismissed Humbert and the secretary with a pleasant nod.—"And now, what is it you want?"

"I wish to present to you, Monseigneur, a young gentleman just arrived from Brittany who has been specially recommended to me. A charming young fellow."

"What is his name?"

"The Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

"De Chanlay—" repeated the Regent thoughtfully, searching to recall a fugitive memory. "The name seems not altogether unfamiliar."

"Really?"

"H'm, I suppose I have heard it mentioned at some time, but I can't remember the circumstances. And what is your friend doing in Paris?"

"It would be a pity to anticipate the surprise, Monseigneur, so I will leave him to tell you out of his own mouth his reasons for coming to Paris."

"To tell me?"

"Certainly.—That is to say, to his Excellency the Duke of Olivarez, whom, if you have no objection, you will impersonate. Oh, a most artful schemer is my young friend the Chevalier; and it has cost me a good deal of trouble with the assistance of my police—the same police, Monseigneur, who followed you to Rambouillet—to arrive at the truth of

the matter. He was instructed to call upon a certain La Jonquière in Paris, who was to present him to the Duke of Olivarez. And now, Monseigneur, no doubt you understand everything."

"I'll be shot if I do!"

"Well, I was the Captain La Jonquière whom he saw; but I can't be both La Jonquière and his Excellency the Duke at one and the same time."

"So you have reserved that part—?"

"For you, Monseigneur."

"You are very good. Then you think I will consent, under a false name, to surprise the secrets—"

"Of your enemies," interrupted Dubois. "Good Lord! what a hideous crime, and how it must distress you to change your name and style of dress! As if you hadn't surprised plenty of secrets of another sort by similar means! Pray bear in mind, Monseigneur, that your life, thanks to the adventurous disposition with which you have been endowed, has been, I might almost say, one continuous masquerade. And, after passing yourself off as M. Alain and Maître Jean, deuce take me if I see how you suffer any loss of dignity in calling yourself the Duke of Olivarez!"

"My dear fellow, if you were proposing this disguise as a means of amusement, I should wish for nothing better, but——"

"But to put on a disguise in order to preserve the integrity of France—to prevent traitors from overthrowing the State—to avoid assassination, perhaps—why, of course, that would be unworthy of you! Yes, yes; I understand. Ah! if it were only to deceive that little grisette of the Pont-Neuf, or the pretty little widow of the Rue Saint-Augustin, it would be a different thing—plague take it! it would be worth the trouble."

"Well, well," replied the Regent. "If I give way to you this time as usual, what will be the result?"

"The result will be that you will be finally convinced that I am under no hallucination, and you will be willing in future to permit yourself to be guarded, since you refuse to take care of yourself."

"But once for all, if the thing prove to be moonshine, shall I be delivered from your eternal fussing and tomfoolery?"

"You shall, upon my honour."

"If you have no objection, Abbé, I should prefer any other sort of oath."

"Pooh! Your Highness is really too hard to please—one oath is as good as another."

"The rascal will always have the last word!"

"Then your Highness consents?"

"You are still harping on that same cracked string?"

"Cracked string indeed! You will see if it is."

"Upon my soul, I'm almost inclined to think you invent all these ridiculous plots on purpose to scare me."

"If so, you will agree when you hear this that I am a very successful inventor."

"Well, if it doesn't frighten me, look out for yourself."

"Now your Highness is too unreasonable."

"Ah! you are flattering me because you are not quite sure of your plot, Dubois."

"No; and I'll go so far as to promise you shall enjoy some slight flutter, and that you will not be sorry to find yourself speaking by the mouth of the Duke of Olivarez."

Having gained his point, Dubois bowed and withdrew, fearing lest the Regent should change his mind. He had scarcely been gone five minutes when a courier entered the ante-chamber hurriedly and handed a letter to a page. The latter, having dismissed the courier, immediately took the letter to the Regent who, as soon as he observed the writing, gave a start of surprise—"Madame Desroches!" he said. "Come, that means there is some news."

Hastily breaking the seal, the Regent read as follows:

MONSEIGNEUR, — The young lady whom you have confided to my charge is not, I think, quite safe here.

"Pooh!" breathed the Regent. He continued reading:

Residence in town, which your Highness considered as unsuitable for her at present, would, I submit, be far better for her than this isolated place. I feel that I lack the power to fulfil my duty and to afford the protection she needs to the young lady whom your Highness has so far honoured me as to place in my care.

"Halloa!" cried the Regent, "it seems to me that matters are becoming complicated."

A young man who, immediately before your arrival yesterday, had written to Mlle. Hélène, presented himself at the door this morning. I wished to refuse him admittance, but Mademoiselle ordered me peremptorily to admit him and to retire, and I was forced to comply, for in her look and tone as she gave me the order I recognised, if your Highness will permit me to say it, the bearing of one born to command.

"Yes," said the Regent, smiling in spite of himself, "she is evidently my daughter." Then he added,—"But who can the young man be? Some young spark who has seen her in the Convent parlour? Why doesn't that fool of a Madame Desroches mention his name? Oh, wait a moment: that's not all."

I believe, Monseigneur, this young man and Mademoiselle have met before. In order to serve your Highness, I tried to overhear the conversation; but owing to the double door I could only distinguish, when he raised his voice, the words, "... to see you as in times gone by." I trust, therefore, that your Highness will see fit to guarantee me against the very real danger of my authority failing to secure the safety of Mlle. Hélène; and I beg you will be good enough to provide me with a definite order in writing by means of which I may defend myself against the angry reproaches of Mademoiselle.

"The devil!" exclaimed the Regent "this makes things still more complicated. A love affair so soon! No, no it isn't possible—so strictly brought up—so carefully kept apart—in the only Convent in France where men are never permitted entrance beyond the parlour—in a province where everybody says moral are uncorrupted! No. It is some adventure outside the limited scope of the Desroches' intelligence: her mind is always running upon the profligacies of the court, and the mischievous behaviour of my other daughters has rendered her mistrustful. Let us see, though; what else has the woman to say?"

P.S.—I have just made enquiries at the inn of the *Tigre-Royal*. The young man arrived yesterday at seven in the evening—that is to say, forty-five minutes before Mademoiselle. He came by the road from Brittany, the same route by which she travelled. The name he gave at the inn was M. de Livry.

"Oho!" cried the Regent, this is more serious: a plan arranged beforehand, evidently. *Pardieu!* Dubois would laugh if I were to tell him. He would echo my remarks about the innocence of young girls who live far from Paris or Versailles—the satirical dog! It is to be hoped the rascal will learn nothing of all this from his spies Hey there, page!"

The page who had brought the letter re-entered. The Duke was hastily scribbling some lines.—"Where is the messenger who came from Rambouillet?" asked the Regent.

"He is waiting for an answer," replied the youth.

"Very well. Give him this note and let him start instantly."

A moment later, and the courtyard resounded with the clatter of hoofs as the courier departed.

As for Dubois, he was at that moment employed in making arrangements for Gaston's interview with the pretended Duke of Olivarez and at the same time indulging in sage reflections somewhat in this strain:—"I have a double hold on the Regent—I hold the Regent and I hold his daughter. Either that young woman's intrigue is serious or it is not. If unimportant, I can easily, by exaggerating it, give it the *coup de grâce*. On the other hand, if it should be serious, I shall gain credit with the Regent for having discovered it. But I mustn't make the mistake of striking the two blows at the same time. *Bis repetita placent*.—There, you are at it again—another quotation—wretched pedant that you are! will you never rid yourself of the habit? It is decided, then; save the Regent first, and his daughter afterwards; and thus procure a double reward. . . . Stop a moment, though,—would it be altogether wise? The Duke first, yes, undoubtedly. If the young woman suffer, it is no great matter; but if the man is killed, the whole kingdom will be ruined.

Well, begin with the Duke, most decidedly."

Having formed this resolution, Dubois despatched an urgent message to M. de Montaran, who, as we have said, was ex-governor of Brittany and resided at Nantes.

Gaston also had determined upon his course of action. He chafed inwardly at finding himself associated with a man of La Jonquière's stamp, and still more at the ignoble necessity of acting in a subordinate capacity to such a petty scoundrel; therefore he felt relieved to think that henceforward he would have to deal with a chief more worthy of the enterprise. He resolved within himself that, should he encounter equal venality and base motives in the higher ranks of the conspirators, he would return to Nantes and relate to his friends what he had seen, and confer with them as to what it behoved him in the circumstances to do next. With regard to Hélène, Gaston no longer hesitated. He knew that she loved him, and he was convinced of her courage and loyalty. He knew very certainly that she would choose to die rather than do aught that would cause her even an involuntary blush in the presence of him whom she loved so dearly. Moreover, her lover was rejoiced to see that her happiness in having found a father had in no way changed her affection towards himself, nor that her present good fortune had weakened her remembrance of the past. But with all this, his anxiety with regard to Hélène's mysterious parentage had been ever-present in the background of his thoughts since he parted from her. Who, Gaston asked himself, would not have been proud, were he even a king, to acknowledge such a daughter? Unless—hateful thought—he were perhaps prevented by some shameful circumstances he dared not reveal.

In view of the coming interview, Gaston gave exquisite attention to his toilet, in obedience to that feeling which prompts a man to dress as carefully for a danger which he has to face as for a pleasure-party. He took pains to increase the striking effect which the picturesque costume of the period lent to his appearance, already markedly attractive in its youth and virile beauty. The fine lines of his face were set off with long hair, black and glossy as the raven's plume; the outline of the shapely leg

accentuated by the silken hose; a perfectly-fitting velvet coat revealed the just slope and breadth of the shoulders; over one shoulder swept the splendid white plume which adorned the hat. Regarding himself in the mirror, Gaston could not but recognize with a smile that, although a conspirator, he was a conspirator of decidedly prepossessing appearance.

Acting upon the advice of Dubois, the Regent, for his part, had donned a suit of black velvet and buried half his face in a vast cravat of Mechlin lace, lest the young man, who no doubt had seen among the innumerable portraits of the period one representing the Duke of Olivarez, should discover that the man to whom he was speaking was not the person represented. The interview was to take place in a little house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain—a house occupied by one of the Regent's mistresses and by his request temporarily placed at his disposal. Between the two principal wings of the house rose an isolated pavilion, completely screened from intrusive daylight and furnished with heavy tapestries. Hither the Regent was driven in a closed carriage which left the Palais-Royal by the back entrance, arriving about five o'clock—that is to say, as night was falling.

CHAPTER XVII

“MONSIEUR, WE ARE BRETONS”

WHILST Gaston, in the room on the ground floor of the inn, was making ready for his intended visit, the versatile Tapin had been completing his apprenticeship to the art and mystery of tavern-keeping. Thus towards the end of the day he was able to measure a pint of wine with all the gay abandon of his predecessor, and with even more exactitude, for it had struck him that, when M. Bourguignon should present his claim for compensation, an item which would figure in the account would be “wastage of material.” Consequently, the less wine wasted, the more he, Tapin, would be likely to receive in the way of bonus. Hence it came about that the customer whom he had just served, after paying

him a second visit in the evening, went away in high displeasure with what she chose to consider a scandalously small pint.

Having finished dressing, the Chevalier, in order to obtain a further insight into the character of Captain La Jonquière, made an inventory of that officer's library. The literature upon the shelves was to be classed under three heads, viz.: works of an amorous nature; arithmetic books; and books treating upon military tactics and strategy. Among the last, a work entitled *The Complete Sergeant-Major* was bound in a specially strong cover and showed evidence of much wear. Finally, there were the Captain's journals—journals of expenditure, be it understood—kept with the painstaking neatness of a regimental quartermaster. A grotesque absurdity on the part of the Captain, thought Gaston, until it occurred to him that the wily conspirator had no doubt been manufacturing evidence of his ordinary mode of life for the benefit of the inquisitive.

While Gaston was thus appreciatively turning over the Captain's books, a visitor was ushered into the room by the attentive landlord, who then directly retired. The man waited until the door was closed, and then, approaching Gaston's ear, informed him that Captain La Jonquière, being himself unable to return, had sent him as a substitute. The Chevalier asked him to show proof of his bona-fides, and the man produced, firstly, a note in the Captain's handwriting and in the same terms as the specimen Gaston possessed. Next he showed the half of the gold coin, and this quite convinced the Chevalier that his visitor was indeed what he represented himself to be. Therefore he had no hesitation in following him. Both entered a closed carriage the windows of which were carefully screened—a precaution which seemed to Gaston very natural. He noticed that they crossed the river by the Pont-Neuf and proceeded along the Quais, but having once entered the Rue du Bac, he had no time for further observation, for next moment the carriage entered a courtyard and pulled up in front of a pavilion. Thereupon without waiting for Gaston to ask, his companion drew from his pocket the folded paper upon which was written the Chevalier's name, thus dispelling an

lingering trace of doubt which might have remained in the young man's mind.

The carriage-door was opened; Gaston and his companion descended, mounted the steps and found themselves in a vast circular corridor forming a ring round the sole apartment of which the pavilion was composed. Before raising the curtain which marked one of the entrances, Gaston looked round for his guide, but his guide had already disappeared.

The Chevalier found himself alone.

His heart beat quickly. The man he was about to face was no vulgar schemer—he no longer had to deal with a mere fool, but with the master-mind of the conspiracy, as it were the rebellion incarnate. He, the Chevalier de Chanlay, as a representative of France, was about to treat with a king's representative. He was about to parley with the might of Spain upon equal terms; to make overtures to the foreigner for an offensive alliance against his native land; to stake a kingdom against a kingdom.

A bell sounded within. At the sound a shiver passed through Gaston. He looked at himself in a mirror and saw how pale he was; he leaned against the wall, for he felt an access of weakness in the limbs; a thousand scruples hitherto unthought of assailed his mind, producing a state of acute nervous tension. But the poor fellow's sufferings were not yet ended. The door opened, and Gaston found himself confronted with a man whom he recognized as La Jonquière.—“Again that man!” he muttered, in deep chagrin.

The Captain, notwithstanding the acuteness of his vision and the restlessness of his glance, showed no signs of having noticed any lack of cordiality in the Chevalier's expression. — “Come, Chevalier,” he said, “his Excellency is waiting for us.”

Confronted with the necessity for immediate action, and conscious of the vital importance of the issue, Gaston by an effort of will succeeded in recovering his composure, and crossed the apartment with a tolerably assured step. His footsteps were rendered inaudible by the thick-pile carpet, and this, in combination with the general unreality of the situation, caused Gaston the curious feeling that, instead of a creature of flesh and blood, he was a disembodied spirit about to keep tryst with another spirit.

With his back turned towards the door, sitting, or rather buried in a vast arm-chair, was a man who neither moved nor spoke, and indeed, all that was visible of him was his legs, crossed one over the other. A single candle, in a silver-gilt candlestick upon the table and covered with a shade, lighted up only his lower limbs; his head and shoulders, within the shadow of a folding screen, remained in semi-darkness. Gaston was impressed by the man's striking features, which noticeably bore the stamp of nobility. The Chevalier's judgment was seldom at fault in matters of physiognomy, and he at once divined that the man before him was of a very different breed from La Jonquière. The mouth and chin conveyed an expression of kindness and good-humour; the well-opened eyes, like those of a king or of a bird of prey, looked out steadily with the quiet confidence of conscious ascendancy. His forehead gave indication of high thinking, and the contour of his jaw showed prudence, combined with a certain degree of firmness. All this appeared to Gaston's sharpened senses in the semi-darkness and in spite of the large lace cravat which partly hid the chin.

“An eagle, at any rate,” thought Gaston. “The other is a crow—or rather, a vulture.”

Captain La Jonquière, hand on hip, and endeavouring to assume a martial bearing, remained respectfully standing. The unknown, having critically regarded the Chevalier who bowed to him in silence, rose and, returning Gaston's salute with an inclination full of dignity, crossed over to the fireplace where he leaned with his back against the mantelpiece.

“This is the gentleman of whom I had the honour of speaking to your Excellency,” said La Jonquière. “M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay.”

Again the unknown bowed slightly, but returned no answer.

“*Mordieu!*” whispered Dubois in the Regent's ear, “if you don't question him you will learn nothing.”

“You are from Brittany, I believe?” said the Duke coldly, addressing Gaston.

“Yes, Monseigneur. But your Excellency will pardon me: Captain La Jonquière has made known to you my name, but I have not yet had the honour of learning with whom I am speaking. If I seem discourteous, you will forgive

me, Monseigneur, when you consider that it is not I who speak—it is the whole province, whose unworthy representative I am."

"Very true, sir, very true," said La Jonquière briskly, and drew from a portfolio upon the table a document bearing a sprawling signature and the seal of the King of Spain.—"Here is the name."

"The Duke of Olivarez," read Gaston. Then, turning to the man by the fireplace he bowed respectfully, failing to notice that the other had coloured slightly at hearing himself thus named.

"And now, sir, you will, I take it, no longer hesitate to speak," said the unknown.

"I had thought it would be my place to listen, first of all," replied Gaston, still on the defensive.

"Perhaps," rejoined the other. "However, it shall be a dialogue—each of us shall speak in turn."

"Monseigneur, I am so sensible of the honour that I will begin by setting the example of confidence."

"I am listening, sir."

"Monseigneur, the leaders in Brittany—"

"The malcontents in Brittany," interrupted the Regent, smiling, in spite of Dubois' warning grimace.

"The malcontents are so numerous," replied Gaston, "that they may be regarded as representing the entire province. However, adopting your Excellency's correction, the malcontents in Brittany have sent me hither in order to learn what are the intentions of Spain in this matter."

"First let us hear what are those of Brittany," said the Regent.

"Spain may have full reliance upon us, Monseigneur. We have passed our word, and Breton loyalty is proverbial."

"And what is the engagement you have entered into with Spain?"

"To use our utmost endeavours to second the French nobility."

"But are you not also Frenchmen?"

"Monseigneur, we are Bretons. Brittany, united to France on the faith of a treaty, is entitled to regard herself as a separate state from the moment when France ceased to respect the rights guaranteed by that treaty."

"Yes, I know the old story of the contract made by Anne of Brittany. It is

now a considerable time since the contract was signed, Monsieur."

The imitation La Jonquière, not liking the polemical drift of the conversation, made free to indicate his disapproval by nudging the Regent vigorously.

"What matters that?" said Gaston, "when each man amongst us knows its terms by heart?"

CHAPTER XVIII

MONSIEUR ANDRÉ

"YOU tell me, then, that the nobility of Brittany are prepared to aid the French nobility to the utmost. What is it the French nobility desire?"

"That the successor to the throne of France, in case of his Majesty's death, should be the King of Spain, as sole heir to Louis XIV."

"Good, very good!" said La Jonquière, thrusting his fingers deeply into a horn snuff-box and refreshing himself with great vigour and satisfaction.

"But you speak of these things as though the King were dead, though he very certainly is not," replied the Regent.

"The Grand Dauphin, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne and their children disappeared in a most deplorable manner."

The Regent paled with anger, and Dubois began to cough.

"Then they reckon upon the King dying?"

"That is the general calculation, Monseigneur," replied the Chevalier.

"Ah, that explains how the King of Spain, in spite of having renounced his pretensions, still has hopes of succeeding to the throne of France. But he will probably expect to encounter some opposition from the party attached to the Regency." The pretended Spaniard involuntarily laid stress upon the last word.

"Indeed, yes," replied the Chevalier. "That contingency has not been overlooked."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dubois, "they have thought of that, have they? Very good, very good indeed! Did I not tell you, Monseigneur, that the Bretons were it

valuable allies? Go on, Monsieur, pray on."

In spite of Dubois' encouragement, Gaston maintained silence.

"Well, sir," said the Duke, whose curiosity was whetted by what he had learned, "I am waiting to hear more."

"The secret is not mine, Monseigneur," replied the young man.

"That means, I take it, that I do not enjoy the full confidence of your leaders?"

"Quite the contrary, but their confidence is in you alone."

"I understand you, sir; but the Captain is one of us, and I answer for him as for myself."

"My instructions are precise, Monseigneur, and I am empowered to confer with you only."

"But I tell you I will answer for the Captain."

"In that case," replied Gaston with a bow, "I have told your Highness all that I have to say."

"You hear, Captain?" said the Regent. "It appears I must ask you to withdraw."

"Very well, Monseigneur," replied Dubois; "but before I leave you I should like to say two words."

Gaston discreetly drew back a few paces.

"Monseigneur," said Dubois, in a whisper, "you must press him close—push him hard, *mordieu!* Tear the inside out of the whole affair, for you will never have such another opportunity. Well, what do you think of our young friend from Brittany?"

"A splendid fellow!" said the Regent. "A thoroughbred, looks you straight in the face, a man of intelligence, too. I like the shape of his head."

"Excellent for chopping off," growled Dubois, rubbing his nose.

"What is that you say?"

"Nothing, Monseigneur. I am quite of your opinion." Then he continued, aloud, "Monsieur de Chanlay, my service to you, and I will see you anon. Any other but myself would take it ill that you refuse to speak before him, but I don't stand upon my dignity, and, provided the result is satisfactory, I care little about the means." Gaston gave a slight inclination.—"It is evident," thought Dubois as he prepared to quit the room, "that my appearance is not sufficiently warlike. That damned nose of mine

again! It has played me this trick before; but, no matter, the headpiece is good enough."

"Well, sir," said the Regent when Dubois had closed the door, "now you have no other listener than myself."

"I am grateful to your Highness," said Chanlay.

"Speak, Monsieur," continued the Regent. Then, with a smile, he added, "I doubt not you well understand my impatience."

"Yes, Monseigneur, for no doubt your Excellency is astonished at not yet having received from Spain a certain despatch to be forwarded to Cardinal Olocroni."

"True," replied the Regent. The lie cost him an effort, but he felt that the circumstances warranted it.

"I will explain the delay, Monseigneur. The messenger who was to have brought the despatch fell ill, and has not yet left Madrid. My friend the Baron de Valef, who happened to be in Spain at the moment, offered to take his place. For some days it remained undecided; but as he was known to be a tried adherent to the cause—he gave ample proof in the Cellamare conspiracy—the despatch was finally entrusted to him."

"Indeed, the Baron de Valef barely escaped the clutches of Dubois' myrmidons," said the Regent. "Upon my word, he is a bold man to attempt the renewal of a work so completely overthrown. I happen to know as a matter of fact that the Regent, after seeing Madame de Maine and the Prince of Cellamare arrested; after seeing MM. de Richelieu, de Polignac, de Malezieux, Brigaud and Mlle. de Launay in the Bastille, and that rascally Grange-Chancel sent off to Sainte Marguerite, believed he had heard the last of the matter."

"You see he was wrong, Monseigneur."

"But are not the rebels of Brittany afraid, if they rise now, that their fellow-conspirators in Paris, whom the Regent holds in his power, will lose their heads?"

"On the contrary, they hope to save them, Monseigneur, or, failing that, they will share the honour of their martyrdom."

"Save them? How?"

"If you please, we will return to the despatch. It is my first duty to remit it to your Excellency, and here it is."

The Regent took the document, but as he was about to break the seal, he ob

served that it was addressed to Olivarez. He placed it upon the table unopened. Strange inconsistency! Yet this man, by means of his agents, broke a couple of hundred seals every day of letters passing through the post. Perhaps the influence of association with Thorey or Dubois will explain it, for now he was in the presence of another type of man.

"Well, Monseigneur—" began the Chevalier, not understanding the Regent's hesitation.

"The contents of this despatch are known to you, no doubt?" asked the Regent.

"Not word for word, Monseigneur, but I know the purport at least."

"Tell me, then. I shall not be sorry to learn how far you have been admitted into the secrets of the Spanish cabinet."

"When the Regent has been suppressed," said Gaston, without noticing that the other started slightly at the words, "the Duc de Maine will be provisionally recognized in his stead. M. le Duc de Maine will at once break the treaty of quadruple alliance drawn up and signed by that villain Dubois."

"I am truly sorry," interrupted the Regent, "that Captain La Jonquière is not present—he would have enjoyed hearing you speak thus. Proceed, sir, proceed."

"The Pretender, assisted by a strong fleet, will make a descent upon the English coast. Prussia, Sweden and Russia will be encouraged to attack Holland. The Emperor will profit by the opportunity to reconquer Naples and Sicily, and thus establish the title to that kingdom he derives through the House of Suabia. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany, about to fall vacant through the failure of issue in the Medici family, will be made over to the second son of the King of Spain. The non-Protestant provinces of the Low Countries will be reunited to the crown of France; Sardinia will be given to the Duke of Savoy, and Comacchio to the Pope. France will thus become the head of the Latin league against the North, and, should Louis XV. not survive, his Majesty Philip V. will be crowned king of half the world."

"Yes, yes, Monsieur, I know all that," said the Regent. "That is but a revival of the plan of Cellamare's conspiracy. But in what you have just said there is a phrase I scarcely understood."

"And that is, Monseigneur — ?" asked Gaston.

"You say, 'the Regent will be suppressed.' How is it proposed to effect that?"

"The former plan, as you are aware, Monseigneur, was to secure his person and remove him to the prison at Saragossa or to the citadel of Toledo."

"Yes; but the Duke's watchfulness upset that plan."

"It was manifestly impracticable; a thousand obstacles stood in the way of his ever reaching Toledo or Saragossa. How, I ask you, were it possible to conduct such a prisoner across the whole breadth of France?"

"It was difficult," said the Duke, "and I have never been able to understand why such a scheme was adopted. I am pleased to learn that the idea has been slightly modified."

"Monseigneur, gaolers can be seduced, there are means of escaping from a prison or a fortress. Then, once more in France, the lost authority can be regained, and those who assisted the plot delivered over to the executioner. Philip V. and Alberoni have nothing to fear; his Excellency the Duke of Olivarez will have crossed the frontier and will be beyond the reach of vengeance; half of the conspirators may succeed in escaping from the Regent, but the other half will pay the reckoning for all."

"Yet —"

"Monseigneur, we are guided by the example of the last conspiracy, and as you yourself have just said, MM. de Richelieu, de Polignac, de Malezieux, de Laval, Brigaude and Mlle. de Launay are still in the Bastille."

"What you say is very reasonable," said the Duke.

"But, on the contrary, by getting rid of the Regent—"

"Yes, you prevent his return. A man may escape from a prison or a fortress but not from the tomb. That is what you would say, is it not?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied Gaston, his voice trembling slightly.

"Then I understand your mission: you have come to Paris with the object of getting rid of the Regent."

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"You intend to kill him?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And you, sir," continued the Regent

regarding the young man with a penetrating glance, "did you offer yourself as the one to carry out that fatal project?"

"No, Monseigneur; never should I have chosen of my own accord the part of assassin."

"Who, then, constrained you to undertake the part?"

"Monseigneur, it was fate."

"Pray explain yourself."

"A committee of five gentlemen was formed of those belonging to the Breton league—an association within an association—and it was agreed among us that the course to be pursued should be that decided upon by the majority."

"I understand," said the Duke. "And it was decided that the Regent should be assassinated."

"That is the fact, Monseigneur. Four of them voted for the assassination, and one against."

"And the one who voted against—?" asked the Duke.

"At the risk of forfeiting your Excellency's confidence, I must admit that that one was myself."

"Then how comes it that you have engaged yourself to accomplish a design of which you disapprove?"

"It was agreed that hazard should decide which of us was to strike the blow."

"And the hazard—?"

"Fell upon myself, Monseigneur."

"Why did you not refuse the mission?"

"None knew how I had voted, since the votes were taken in a secret ballot. My refusal would have been attributed to cowardice."

"Then you have come to Paris—"

"With the object I have disclosed to you, Monseigneur."

"And you count upon me—?"

"As an enemy of the Regent to aid me in the accomplishment of an enterprise which not only involves the interests of Spain, but also promises to save our friends in the Bastille."

"Are you not exaggerating the danger they run?"

"They are upon the brink of the scaffold. The Regent has obtained proofs against them, and has declared that, had M. de Richelieu four heads instead of one, he owned proof sufficient to cause them to fall."

"He said those words in a hasty moment."

"Can it be that you would defend the Duke, Monseigneur?—that you tremble because a man devotes himself for the welfare, not only of his fellows, but of two kingdoms? Do you then hesitate to accept that sacrifice?"

"If your enterprise should fail?"

"Every benefit has its corresponding disadvantage, Monseigneur; if one has failed to be the saviour of his country, the glory remains to him of dying a martyr to the cause."

"But you will observe that, if I assist you to obtain access to the Regent, I become your accomplice."

"Does that alarm you, Monseigneur?"

"It does indeed alarm me; for when you have been arrested—"

"Well, when I have been arrested—?"

"It might well happen that, under torture, you would be forced to reveal the names of those—"

Gaston interrupted the Prince with a gesture, and smiled with supreme disdain. "Monseigneur, you are a foreigner—you are a Spaniard," he said, "and therefore perhaps you cannot appreciate what it means to be a French gentleman. On that account I can forgive the insulting suggestion."

"Then I can depend upon your silence?"

"Pontcalec, Du Couëdic, Talhouët and Montlouis for a moment doubted my good faith, and have since apologised."

"It is well, Monsieur. I will give the matter my grave consideration, you may depend; yet were I in your place—"

"Well, Monseigneur?"

"I would give up the enterprise."

"I am fain to admit, Monseigneur, I would give much never to have entered upon it, for since I threw in my lot with the conspirators a great change has taken place in my life. But having put my hand to the plough, I cannot look back."

"Even if I refuse to help you?" asked the Duke.

"That contingency has been foreseen," replied Gaston, with a smile.

"And they decided, in that case—?"

"To proceed without your help."

"Then your resolution—?"

"Is irrevocable, Monseigneur."

"I have said all I had to say," rejoined the Duke. "Well, if nothing will shake

your resolution, proceed with your undertaking."

"It would seem that you wish to withdraw, Monseigneur."

"Have you anything further to communicate to me?"

"To-day, no; but to-morrow—the day after to-morrow—"

"You can avail yourself of the Captain as a go-between. Let me know through him, and I will receive you whenever you wish."

"Monseigneur," said Gaston in a tone of manly sincerity emphasized by his earnest look and the dignity of his bearing, "I will be frank with you. We can dispense with the mediation of such fellows as he. Your Excellence and myself, wide as is the difference in rank and merit which separates us, are upon an equality at least before the scaffold which threatens us both. There I have even the advantage of you, for the risk I run is obviously greater than your own. Nevertheless you are now, Monseigneur, a conspirator even as the Chevalier de Chanlay, with this difference, that you have the right, in virtue of superior rank, to see his head fall before you in turn kneel to the block. Grant me leave, therefore, to negotiate with your Excellency upon equal terms, and permit me to see you when occasion requires."

The Regent reflected for a moment. "Very well," he said; "this house is but a temporary residence—now that war is impending I receive few visitors, you will understand; my position in France is a delicate one, and I hold it on a precarious tenure. Cellamare is in prison at Blois, and my position here is scarcely more influential than that of a consul—useful for the protection of my compatriots and also convenient as a hostage—therefore I cannot be too circumspect." The Regent was unused to falsehood, and it cost him a painful effort to finish his phrases consistently. "You must address your letters to Monsieur André, poste restante, stating the time you wish to see me, and I will arrange to be here."

"Through the post?" enquired Gaston.

"Yes; there will only be a delay of three hours, certainly no more. One of my men shall wait for each delivery and bring me your letter, should there be one. Three hours later you will arrive here and I shall be ready to meet you."

"That is very well so far," said Gaston with a laugh, "but your Excellency forgets that I do not know where I am—I don't know the name of the street nor the number of the house, for I came here after dark—how can I possibly find the house again? Ah, Monseigneur, you must devise a better means. You have asked a few hours for reflection. Let us say until to-morrow morning—send for me at eleven o'clock. We must arrange our work carefully beforehand lest our plans break down ignominiously, like those highwaymen plotters, who fail because the road has been blocked by a coach upset, or their powder wetted by a passing shower."

"Well said, Monsieur de Chanlay. To-morrow, then, about eleven o'clock, I will send a carriage to your hotel, and you will meet me here and discuss the whole matter with me in entire freedom."

This conclusion having been arrived at, Gaston, after rendering his formal compliments, which were politely acknowledged by the Duke, took leave of his Excellency the Spanish Ambassador. The guide who had already served the Chevalier was waiting for him in the vestibule and led him, as Gaston did not fail to notice, across a garden he had not seen on his arrival, thence into the street by way of a different door, beside which the same carriage stood in readiness. He entered the vehicle and had scarcely seated himself before the carriage was in rapid motion towards the Rue de Bourdonnais.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS

NO longer could the Chevalier cherish an illusion—one day more, or at most two, and he must gird himself for the deed. Ay, and what a deed!

The personality of the Spanish envoy had made a deep impression upon Gaston. He recognized with some surprise that, apart from the sordid necessities of politics, the man with whom he had been dealing was an honourable and great-hearted gentleman. A strange fancy haunted Gaston's mind. The

stern forehead and alert eyes of the Spaniard seemed to bear a vague and distant likeness to the open brow and gentle eyes of Hélène—an idea at once perplexing and unsubstantial as the fabric of a dream. Gaston found that, in spite of all reason and probability, these two faces had become inseparably associated in his thoughts.

Fatigued by the emotions of the day, Gaston was in the act of retiring to rest when the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard in the street. The door of the inn was flung open, and Gaston, in his room on the ground floor, seemed to gather that an animated colloquy was being held. Soon the door was re-fastened, and, as the sounds died away, Gaston fell into the untroubled sleep which visits the pillow of youth, even of such as are conspirators or are in love.

Gaston had not been deceived; what he imagined he had heard had actually taken place. The horseman who had arrived was an honest countryman from Rambouillet, and he had received two louis from a young and pretty woman to convey a letter post-haste to M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay at the inn of the *Muid d'Amour* in the Rue des Bourdonnais. The identity of the young and pretty woman may easily be guessed.

Tapin took the letter and handled it curiously. Then, unfastening the white apron in which he was swathed, and, leaving the hotel in the care of his chief cook, a rascal of considerable intelligence, hurried off to seek Dubois as fast as his long legs would carry him.

"Eh! what's that? A letter?" cried Dubois. "That requires inspection." He unfastened the envelope deftly with the aid of steam, and, as he read the letter and the signature, burst into an immoderate fit of chuckling.—"Good! Excellent!" he said. "The thing develops in a most gratifying manner. Let the young people run free. They are going at a deuce of a pace, but we have a good grip of the reins, and can pull 'em up short whenever we please." Dubois refastened the envelope artistically, then, turning to the messenger—"Well," he said, "you may deliver the letter."

"When?" asked Tapin.

"At once," replied Dubois.

The spy made a step towards the door.—"On second thought, no,"

continued Dubois. "Let it stay till to-morrow. That will be quite soon enough."

Tapin saluted and was about to leave, but as he reached the door he turned.—"May I be allowed, Monseigneur, to make a remark which concerns myself?" he asked.

"Out with it, ye dog!"

"I am earning three crowns a day as your Highness's agent."

"Is that not enough, rascal?"

"Quite enough for that employment, and I was not thinking of complaining; but damme if it's enough for this tavern-keeping job! Of all the peddling games—!"

"You should drink, you clown! That will keep you amused."

"I take no pleasure in drinking since I've been in the trade."

"Because you know what the wine is made of. But you can drink champagne or Spanish wines—there must be some decent stuff in the place—and it is Bourguignon who will pay the damage. By-the-way, he has really had a seizure; so that your story was no lie after all—you were merely anticipating the fact by a few hours."

"You don't mean that, Monseigneur?"

"Yes. The fright you gave him was the cause of it. How would it suit you to be heir to his fortune, gallows-bird?"

"Not I, ecod! It's too slow a game to please me."

"Very well, I'll double your pay during the time you continue this respectable occupation, and then I'll make you a present of the business—it will make a fine dowry for your eldest girl. Now be off, and bring me as many such letters as you like. You will always be welcome."

Tapin returned to the *Muid-d'Amour* at the same rapid pace as he had gone to the Palais-Royal. Acting upon Dubois' recommendation, he kept back the letter until the following morning.

At six o'clock Gaston was stirring. It is only fair to M. Tapin to say that at the first sound he heard in the Chevalier's room he entered and handed the letter to its proper owner. Gaston, as he recognized the writing, grew red and pale in turns; but when he read the contents his pallor became more marked. Tapin, making a pretence of tidying the room, watched the Chevalier out of the corner of his eye.

The letter indeed contained disquieting news. It ran as follows:

DEAR FRIEND,—I have been reflecting upon your warning, and it may be that you were right. However it may be, I feel very uneasy. A carriage has just arrived and Madame Desroches orders me to start. When I attempted resistance I was locked up in my room; by good fortune a peasant has stopped outside to water his horse, and I am giving him two louis to bear this letter to you. I can hear the last preparations for departure being made, and in two hours' time we start for Paris. On my arrival I will inform you of my new address even if I am compelled to thwart opposition by jumping out of the window.

Be assured, dear friend, that she who has given you her heart will always keep herself worthy of herself and of you.

"Ah, it is as I feared!" thought Gaston. "It is dated eight o'clock in the evening—great Heavens! she must already have arrived. M. Lafitte, why did you delay bringing me this letter?"

"Your Honour was asleep and I judged it best to wait until you woke," replied Tapin in his most suave manner.

How reply to a man so fertile in excuses? Besides, Gaston reflected that in giving vent to his anger he ran a risk of betraying his secret. Restraining himself, therefore, he prepared to go to the Barrière to watch for Hélène's arrival, if by chance she had not already passed. He rapidly finished dressing, buckled on his sword-belt, and, with a final injunction to the landlord to inform Captain La Jonquière, should that gentleman call during his absence, that he would be back by nine o'clock, he hastened away.

Gaston reached the Barrière quite hot and out of breath, having made the journey on foot, for he had met no fiacre on the way.

Whilst leaving the Chevalier full leisure to regain his normal temperature as he waits in vain for Hélène, who had entered Paris at two o'clock in the morning, let us take a brief retrospect. We have seen the Regent receive Madame Desroches' letter and reply to it by the same courier, for indeed it seemed urgently necessary to adopt prompt

measures for rescuing Hélène from the undesirable attentions of M. de Livry. But who could this young man be? thought the Regent. Dubois alone would be able to tell; accordingly, when Dubois made his appearance about five o'clock in the evening in order to accompany his Royal Highness to the Rue du Bac, the Regent had taken the opportunity to question him as to the status and identity of a certain young gentleman named De Livry, residing at Nantes.

Dubois rubbed his nose thoughtfully, for he saw what the Regent was driving at.—"Livry? Livry. . . . Let me see. . . .," said Dubois.

"Yes, Livry."

"A branch of the Matignons, I fancy."

"Pooh! that's no explanation—that's pure guess-work."

"Well, how should I know? Livry? That's no name at all. Send for M. d'Hoziér."

"Don't be absurd."

"But you know, Monseigneur, I don't study genealogy; I'm but a poor, base-born vulgarian."

"Enough of this nonsense!"

"Oh! the devil! your Highness takes a serious interest, then, in these De Livrys. Are you thinking of decorating some member of the family? In that case of course it is a different thing—you may depend upon my finding an illustrious origin for them."

"To the devil with you! And, on the way, you can send Nocé to me."

Dubois smiled his most engaging smile and took himself off. Soon after, the door opened and Nocé appeared. Nocé was a man of some forty years of age, of distinguished bearing, tall, handsome and grave, a polished courtier, and a keen, yet kindly wit,—qualities which endeared him to the Regent of whom he was one of the most trusted companions.

"Monseigneur wishes to see me?" he said.

"Ah! 'tis you, Nocé? Glad to see you."

"Your servant, Monseigneur," said Nocé, bowing. "Can I be of any assistance to your Highness?"

"Yes, let me have the loan of your house in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, but let it be strictly proper and in order, you understand. I wish to lodge some of my people there, and I don't want the place too ornate——"

"H'm is it for a prude, Monseigneur?"

"You've hit it, Nocé."

"Then why not take a house in town, Monseigneur? The houses in the Faubourg have a dubious reputation, I warn you."

"The person I think of installing there would not even understand such a reputation, Nocé."

"*Peste!* Permit me to tender my sincere congratulations, Monseigneur."

"But not a word, not a word, Nocé—what?"

"Not a syllable."

"No flowers or devices—take down any pictures that seem at all naughty. What about the panels and mirrors, Nocé?"

"The panels and mirrors may remain, Monseigneur. They are quite decent."

"Perfectly decent, are they?"

"Could not be more so. Even a Maintenon would not be shocked."

"Pass the panels, then;—but you answer for them?"

"Monseigneur, I would prefer not to take such a responsibility; I am no prude myself, and perhaps am scarcely qualified to judge. Perhaps it would be as well to obliterate all the panels."

"Pooh! only for a day, Nocé, 'tis not worth the trouble. Subjects from mythology, I suppose?"

"H'm," breathed Nocé enigmatically.

"Besides, it would take too long, and I have only a few hours at my disposal. Let me have the keys at once, will you?"

"Give me a quarter of an hour to return home, and they shall be in your Highness's hands."

"Your hand, Nocé. No spying—no curiosity, if you love me."

"Monseigneur, I am going hunting and shall not return before your Highness recalls me."

"Good fellow! Adieu until to-morrow."

Thus having secured a suitable house for Hélène's temporary reception, the Regent sat down and wrote a second letter to the Desroches, which he sent off with a carriage to convey Hélène, after the latter had been made acquainted with the purport of the letter he had just written, which however was not to be shown to her. This is what the letter contained:

MY DEAR CHILD,—On reflection, I have decided to have you near me. You will please me, therefore, if you accompany Madame Desroches without losing a moment. When you arrive in Paris you will receive further news from YOUR DEVOTED FATHER.

On hearing this letter read to her by Madame Desroches, Hélène had by entreaties and tears endeavoured to gain some delay, but this time quite without effect, and she had perforce to obey. It was then that, taking advantage of a moment's solitude, she had written to Gaston the letter we have read, and found a means of having it delivered by a messenger on horseback. Immediately afterwards she entered the carriage looking back regretfully to the habitation which was dear to her, for there she had found a father and had been visited by her lover.

As for Gaston, he had hurried to the Barrière as we have said, as soon as he received Hélène's letter. Day was breaking when he arrived. Several carriages passed him, but in none of them could he see anyone resembling her whom he sought. By degrees he became chilled by the increasing cold, and the hope in his heart died away; he retraced his steps to the inn to see if there might not be a letter waiting for him. As the young man crossed the Tuileries gardens the hour of eight struck.

At that moment Dubois, carrying a portfolio under his arm, was entering the Regent's bedroom with a triumphant smile upon his face.

CHAPTER XX

ARTIST VERSUS POLITICIAN

"**A**H! you, is it, Dubois?" said the Regent as he caught sight of his Minister.

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied Dubois, drawing some papers from his portfolio. "Well, do you find our Bretons still to your liking?"

"What papers are those?" asked the Regent who, in spite of his conversation of the night before, or perhaps even

because of it, entertained a sympathetic feeling towards De Chanlay.

"Oh! a mere nothing," replied Dubois. "First of all, there is a report of what passed yesterday evening between M. le Chevalier de Chanlay and his Excellency the Duke of Olivarez."

"You were listening, then?" asked the Regent.

"Good! and what do you suppose I should be doing, Monseigneur."

"And you heard——?"

"Everything. Now I should be pleased to know your Highness's opinion of his Catholic Majesty's pretensions."

"I think it very possible that they use his authority and keep him in ignorance."

"And Cardinal Alberoni, too? Ecod! Monseigneur, the waggish knave sports with kingdoms like a showman with his puppets! The Pretender to be launched upon England, while Sweden and Russia wreak their playful designs upon Holland. The Empire gathers in Naples and Sicily, and the son of Philip V. is made happy with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Inconsiderable trifles such as Sardinia and Comacchio to be tossed to the Duke of Savoy and his Holiness the Pope respectively; and finally, lest France should feel slighted by neglect, she is to have the privilege of belonging to Spain. Really the scheme betrays a certain breadth of outlook one would scarce have expected in an ex-bellringer."

"Mere vapour—pure moonshine, all these plans and projects."

"And the Breton committee, is that also mere vapour?" asked Dubois.

"I am forced to recognise that its existence is real."

"Our young friend's poniard, is that also pure moonshine?"

"Nay; and I even think it likely it would be handled with effect."

"Ecod! Monseigneur, you complained of the last conspiracy that the plotters were only of the curled and scented variety; well, you should have no occasion to grumble this time. There is no lackadaisical trifling about these fellows' methods."

"Do you know," said the Regent thoughtfully, "this De Chanlay strikes me as a singularly vigorous character?"

"Good! That is the last straw that you should conceive an admiration for the rascal. Ah! Monseigneur, I know you—you are very capable of it!"

"How is it, I wonder, that it is always among his enemies and never among his friends that a prince meets with characters of this stamp?"

"Why, because hatred is a passion, Monseigneur, and devotion is often only another name for greed. But if your Highness will quit for a moment these lofty heights of philosophy to consider the ignoble needs of material affairs, and will sign these two documents——"

"What are they?" asked the Regent.

"The first: a major's commission to be granted to a captain."

"Captain La Jonquière, is he?"

"By no means; that particular rascal we will hang in effigy when we have no more use for him; but in the meantime, Monseigneur, we must handle him tenderly."

"Who is the captain?"

"A gallant officer whom your Highness met a few days, or rather, a few nights ago in a respectable house in the Rue Saint-Honoré."

"What do you mean?"

"I perceive it will be necessary to assist your memory, Monseigneur, since your memory is so poor."

"Come, out with it, man! You are always so long-winded."

"I will put it in a few words; your Highness, a week ago, went out disguised as a Musketeer by the door in the Rue de Richelieu, accompanied by Nocé and Simiane."

"That is true; now what happened in the Rue Saint-Honoré? Let us see."

"Do you wish to know, Monseigneur?"

"If you please."

"To your Highness I can refuse nothing."

"Then speak up, speak up!"

"His Highness the Regent took supper in a little house in the Rue Saint-Honoré."

"With Nocé and Simiane still?"

"No; tête-à-tête; Nocé and Simiane took supper also, but each separately."

"Go on."

"Monseigneur the Regent was having supper and had arrived at the dessert when a worthy officer, no doubt mistaking the door, knocked so persistently that Monseigneur, growing annoyed, went out and used such disparaging remarks towards the man who had created the unseasonable disturbance that the officer, who it appears is not naturally patient of

reproof, very soon whipped out his sword; whereupon Monseigneur, who never thinks twice when he perceives an opportunity to commit a folly, gallantly bared his blade and stood up to the officer."

"And the result of the duel was—?" asked the Regent.

"That your Highness received a scratch upon the shoulder in exchange for which you bestowed upon your opponent a very pretty sword-thrust through the chest."

"Not dangerous, I hope?" asked the Regent with some anxiety.

"Fortunately, no. The blade only glanced along the ribs."

"I am glad of that."

"But that is not all."

"How?"

"It seems that your Highness had a particular dislike to that officer."

"Nonsense. I had never seen him before."

"Oh! if a prince cannot wish a man ill unless he sees him, at any rate he can strike him from a distance."

"What do you mean? Come, finish the story."

"I mean to say that I have made enquiries and find that this gentleman had held the grade of Captain for eight years until your Highness came into power, when he was cashiered."

"If he was cashiered I have no doubt he deserved to be."

"Stay, Monseigneur, you give me an idea. Since we are infallible, we ought to persuade the Pope to recognize our infallibility."

"He may perhaps have shown the white feather."

"He was one of the bravest officers in the army."

"Committed some dishonourable action, then."

"He is as honourable a man as ever stepped."

"In that case, the injustice must be remedied."

"Precisely! That is why I had his Major's brevet drawn up."

"Give it me, Dubois, give it me. There is good in you at times, it seems."

A sardonic grin wrinkled the Abbé's averted face as he extracted a second document from his portfolio. The Regent meanwhile eyed him with mistrust.—"What is this other paper?" he asked.

"Monseigneur," replied Dubois, "you have righted an injustice; now I ask you to confirm an act of justice."

"A warrant to arrest the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay and confine him in the Bastille!" cried the Regent. "Ah! you dog, now I know why you wished me to do a good action. Throw him a sop, thought you, and he'll swallow the hateful draught blindfold. Wait a little, though; this demands consideration."

"Does it seem to your Highness that such measures would be an abuse of power?" asked Dubois with a laugh.

"Nay . . . but still——"

"Monseigneur," continued Dubois, dropping his bantering tone and speaking with earnestness, "when a man is responsible for the government of a kingdom it is above all things necessary to govern."

"That sounds obvious, Mr. Pedant, and, if I do not delude myself, I certainly am master."

"To distribute rewards, yes, but on condition that you do not shrink from punishing. The balance of justice is falsified, Monseigneur, when one of the scales is for ever weighed with uncalculating sympathy with the offender. To act according to your impulse, as you frequently do, is not the act of a just, but of a weak man. For how, Monseigneur, can you reward the deserving if you will not punish the culpable?"

"But if you expect severity from me in this case," said the Regent with the petulance of a man who feels that the cause he is defending is a poor one, "why did you go out of your way to arrange that interview with the young man? Why give me an opportunity of appreciating his worth? You should have allowed me to suppose he was but a commonplace type of conspirator."

"Very fine; because the young fellow cuts a romantic figure, your Highness's artistic temperament comes into play and your imagination runs away with you. Deuce take it! Monseigneur, there is a time for all things! Dabble in chemistry with Humbert; draw your etchings with Audran; occupy yourself with music in company with Lafare; make love to all the women in Paris, if it so please you, but with me—do not expect advice upon a policy which I know to be unsound."

"Good heavens! is it after all worth while?" said the Regent, "surrounded as

I am by spies, harassed and misrepresented, is it worth while, I say, to take all this trouble to preserve my life?"

"But it is not merely a case of defending your life, Monseigneur. Your position renders you a mark for misrepresentation and calumny—and heaven knows you should be proof against them by this time—yet even your most envenomed opponents have never yet dreamed of accusing you of cowardice. Your life! . . . You proved at Steinkerck, at Nerwinden, at Lerida at what rate you valued it! If you were a private gentleman, a minister or even a prince of the blood, and your life were taken by an assassin, a man's heart would cease to beat and that would be all; but, rightly or wrongly, you were ambitious of a place among the mighty ones of the earth. To gain that place you set aside the will of Louis XIV., you drove the bastards from the throne whereon they had already placed their feet, you made yourself Regent of France—that is to say, the keystone of the world's arch. Were you to die by the hand of an assassin, it is not a man who falls—it is the pillar sustaining the whole European edifice which topples; and the laborious work of these four years of vigilance and strife is undone—all around is shattered! Take England: the Chevalier of St. George begins afresh the mad enterprise of his father. Holland: she would be ground beneath the heels of Prussia, Sweden and Russia. Look at Austria: her double-headed eagle swoops down upon Venice and Milan to indemnify her for the loss of Spain. What of France?—France would no longer be France, but a vassal of Philip V. Then again, think of Louis XV., the last scion of an illustrious race—the last link with the most glorious reign the world has ever seen—and the child whom, by our vigilance and care, we have saved from the fate which overtook his father, mother and uncles, in order that he may seat himself in security upon the throne of his ancestors. The child would again fall into the hands of those whom a venial law has designated as his successors. Thus, on every hand, murder and desolation, ruin and incendiarism, civil war and foreign war, and for what?—Because Monseigneur Philippe d'Orléans is pleased to consider himself still Governor of the Royal Household and commander of the forces in Spain, forgetting that he laid

aside those offices the day he became Regent of France."

"If you will have it!" cried the Regent, taking a pen in hand.

"Stay a moment, Monseigneur," said Dubois. "In a matter so important let it not be said that you yielded to my importunities. I have said what I had to say, and now I will leave you; act as seems best to yourself. I leave you the warrant, and I go to attend to some business I have in hand; I will return for the signature in a quarter of an hour." With these words Dubois, feeling that he had risen to the occasion nobly, bowed and withdrew.

Left to himself, the Regent fell into a deep fit of abstraction. The whole sinister affair, pursued with such tenacity of purpose—the recrudescence of a conspiracy which had been scotched in its earlier manifestation—affected the mind of the Duke with gloomy forebodings. He had braved death unmoved upon the battle-field, he had laughed at the scheme of abduction planned by the Spanish ministers in concert with the illegitimate sons of Louis XIV.; but this time, in spite of himself, he was oppressed with horror of lurking foes implacably bent upon his destruction. Yet he could not withhold a certain feeling of admiration towards the young man who held the poniard raised to strike him down. At moments, hatred towards the assassin filled his breast; then he found himself making excuses for the Chevalier almost as though he loved him. Dubois, tearing the heart out of the conspiracy, like a savage ape crouched upon the quivering body of his prey, seemed to the Regent to be endowed with superhuman intelligence and force of will. He, the Duke, ordinarily so courageous, felt that in a like conjuncture he would have defended his life ineffectually. Once more he took up the pen; the paper lay before his eyes and drew him irresistibly.

"Yes, Dubois is right," thought the Regent. "My life is no longer my own to risk as it were upon a throw of the dice. Yesterday I heard from my mother's lips the same warning he gave me to-day. Who knows how the world would suffer were I to fall? The same calamities, perhaps, as when my ancestor, Henri IV., was killed. After having reconquered his kingdom foot by foot, he was about to profit by the ten years' interval of peace

and prosperity and the goodwill of his subjects to add Alsace and Lorraine, and perhaps Flanders, to the crown of France; whilst the Duke of Savoy, his son-in-law, penetrating the Alps, was preparing to hew out a kingdom for himself in Lombardy and, with the neighbouring territory, enrich the Venetian Republic and strengthen the Duchies of Mantua, Modena and Florence. Thenceforward France would have been at the head of the European powers: all was in readiness for achieving this grand result after the preparations of a lifetime of a king who was at once a legislator and a soldier. Then came that fatal 13th of May when the carriage bearing the royal arms passed through the Rue de la Féronnerie and the hour of three sounded upon the bells of the Innocents!... In an instant all was in ruin: the past prosperity and hopes for the future; and it needed an entire century, a minister like Richelieu and a king like Louis XIV. to heal the wound which the knife of Ravallac had inflicted upon France. . . . Yes, Dubois is right," cried the Duke, rousing himself; "I must leave this young man to the arm of justice. 'Tis not I who condemn him: 'tis the function of the judges who try his case. . . . Besides," he continued, smiling at the thought, "I have always the privilege of pardoning."

His natural buoyancy of mind restored by the remembrance of the royal prerogative which he exercised in the name of Louis XV., the Regent hastily signed the warrant; then, summoning his valet, he retired to another apartment in order to change his toilet. A few minutes later, the door of the room he had just quitted was quietly opened, and Dubois slowly and stealthily intruded his wizened face. Having convinced himself that the room was deserted, the Abbé softly approached the table at which the Regent had been seated, cast a rapid glance at the warrant, smiled triumphantly as he observed the signature, took the paper and slowly folded it in four, put it in his pocket and walked off with an air of deep satisfaction and a jaunty step.

CHAPTER XXI

BLOOD *will* TELL

WHEN Gaston returned from his fruitless journey to the Barrière de la Conférence he found on entering his room at the inn Captain La Jonquière comfortably installed in front of the fire, preparing to discuss a newly-opened bottle of Alicante.

"Ha! Chevalier," said the Captain, waving his hand to Gaston with easy grace, "how do you like my rooms? Convenient—what? . . . Take a seat and try this wine. It's quite as good as any Rousseau I'm acquainted with. Have you ever tried Rousseau, by the way? I suppose not—you are from the country. They don't drink wine in Brittany, I understand—ale or cider, crowslip-wine—stuff of that sort, hey? When I was there I was obliged to fall back on brandy. Nothing else drinkable for a man like me."

Gaston made no reply for the simple reason that he had not listened to what La Jonquière was saying, so fully was his mind occupied with one idea. He dropped into a chair abstractedly, turning over in his pocket Hélène's first letter.—"Where can she be?" was the question which would suggest itself to his mind. "In this vast city she may be hidden from me for ever. Oh! I am beset with difficulties—difficulties too great for a man without influence, without experience!"

Dubois had read the thoughts which passed through the young man's mind with unerring intuition.

"I forgot to mention, Chevalier," resumed the pretended warrior, "that there is a letter waiting for you."

"From Brittany?" asked Gaston, coming to himself with a start.

"No, no, from Paris! A pretty little feminine handwriting—aha! you rascal!"

"Where is it?" asked the Chevalier.

"You must ask our worthy host. When I came in a minute ago he was pawing it over."

"The letter! The letter!" cried Gaston, darting into the tavern.

"Did you call, sir?" asked Tapin, with obsequious politeness.

"Where is this letter?"

"Which letter, sir?"

"The letter brought here for me."

"Quite right, sir, pardon me—how came I to forget it?" He pulled the letter from his pocket and gave it to Gaston.

"Poor young fool!" thought Dubois. "What an absurdity for innocents of this kind to mix themselves up with conspiracies! It was just the same with D'Harmental. They fancy they can combine politics and love. Double-dyed idiots! Why don't they go and make love to La Fillon? They would run less risk of ending their political career ignominiously in the Place de Grève. . . . Ah, well, it's as well for us, perhaps, that they are as they are, for they certainly don't regard *us* with any great affection."

Gaston returned wearing a look of elation and reading Hélène's letter over and over. "The house is in the Faubourg St. Antoine, a white house behind trees—poplars, I think. The number of the house I could not see, but it is the thirty-first or thirty-second on the left after you pass on the right a turreted château which looks like a prison."—"Oh!" mused Gaston, "I shall have no difficulty in finding the château, it is the Bastille."

Unconsciously he had spoken aloud, and Dubois had overheard the last words.

"Ecod! I rather imagine you *will* find it," thought Dubois, "even if it should be my distressing duty to take you there myself."

Gaston looked at his watch; he had still two hours to spare before the time appointed for the meeting in the Rue du Bac. Taking his hat, which he had placed upon a chair on entering, he was preparing to go out, when Dubois called to him—"Hullo! Not going away, are you?"

"I must."

"Don't forget the meeting at eleven o'clock."

"It is not nine yet. I will be back in time."

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"No, thank you."

"Anything in the way of an abduction? If that is what you are contemplating, I understand the business thoroughly, and you might be glad of my help."

"Thank you," said Gaston, colouring with vexation. "There is no question of anything of the kind." Dubois nodded

urbanely and whistled through his teeth with the air of a man not to be deceived, although much too polite to contradict.—"Shall I find you here?" asked Gaston.

"I won't promise. I may perhaps have to console some pretty little woman who dotes upon me. But still, if I'm not here, you will find the man who called upon you yesterday with the same carriage and the same coachman."

Gaston hastily took leave of his companion. At the corner of the churchyard of the Innocents he took a fiacre and ordered the coachman to drive him to the Rue Saint-Antoine. Having reached that street, he left the carriage, and, after giving instructions to the driver to follow him, proceeded on foot to examine the houses beginning from number 20 on the left side. Soon he found himself faced by a high wall behind which grew tall poplar trees. The place corresponded so well with the description given by Hélène that the young man felt assured he had found the house he was seeking. But here began his difficulties; there was no opening in the wall, and the solid gate was unprovided with either knocker or bell. Such conveniences were indeed of little account to fashionable callers who, when they went to pay a visit, always had their mounted footmen galloping in advance, whose custom it was to hammer with their silver-headed sticks upon the doors at which they required admittance. Gaston might well have dispensed with a footman had he wished to knock for himself either with his boot or with a stone; but fearing to adopt the obvious course lest he should be denied admittance, he ordered the driver to stop; then, entering a narrow alley by the side of the house, and approaching as nearly as possible to an open window which looked out upon the garden, he imitated the cry of a screech-owl in order that Hélène, should she be within, might know of his presence.

The young man's calculation was justified by the event. Hélène heard and recognized with a start the piercing cry she had so often heard across the wild heaths of Brittany. It seemed to her that she was back again at the Convent and that as of old the boat, pulled by Gaston's strong arms, was approaching her window through the bulrushes and water-lilies. The cry proved to her that Gaston had not failed her; in a flutter

she ran to the window and saw that he was there. Joyfully she waved her hand to him in token of recognition; then turning quickly, she rang a small hand-bell, for which she was indebted to the generosity of Madame Desroches, though no doubt it had been given her for quite another purpose. So vigorous a use did she make of the bell that not only Madame Desroches, but also a maid and a footman came running to answer the summons.

"Open the front door," said H  l  ne quietly, but in the tone of one who expects obedience. "I wish to see the gentleman who is at the door."

The footman made a movement to obey. "Stop a moment," said Madame Desroches hastily. "Let me see who this person is."

"There is no occasion. I know who he is, and I tell you I am expecting him."

"But perhaps you ought not to see him, Mademoiselle," rejoined the duenna, trying hard to hold her own.

"I am no longer at the Convent, nor am I under confinement, I think," replied H  l  ne coldly. "It is for me to say whom I will receive."

"But at least I may know who this person is."

"Oh, yes; there is no reason why you should not. It is the gentleman who visited me at Rambouillet."

"M. de Livry?"

"Yes."

"I have received distinct orders that that gentleman be not allowed to see you."

"And I order that he be admitted at once."

"Mademoiselle, you are disobeying your father," replied the duenna, in a tone which betrayed the struggle between the respect she owed and the rage she endeavoured to conceal.

"This does not concern my father, nor would he uphold your assumed authority."

"Then whose authority do you acknowledge?"

"In this case, my own, simply and solely," replied H  l  ne, in open revolt at the restrictions her duenna sought to impose upon her.

"But I declare, Mademoiselle, I declare that your father——"

"My father will approve of what I do if he be my father." The words were uttered with the proud inflection of an empress, and Madame Desroches, recog-

nizing that she had to deal with a superior will, saw no alternative but to yield. She yielded therefore, but by no means with grace. With a scornful tilt of the nose she relapsed into rigidity and silence equal to that of the domestics who were witnesses of the altercation.

"I ordered the door to be opened—why are my orders not obeyed?" said H  l  ne.

No one stirred; the servants waited for instructions from the duenna.

H  l  ne smiled scornfully. Disdaining to argue with lackeys, she approached the door, waving Madame Desroches from her path with an imperious gesture. With quiet dignity H  l  ne descended the staircase, followed by Madame Desroches, petrified with amazement at this display of wilfulness in a young girl scarcely out of a Convent.

"Why, she speaks like a queen!" said the maid as she followed in the wake of Madame Desroches. "I know well enough I should have gone to open the door if she had not gone herself."

"Ah yes! she is just like all the rest of the family," replied the sorely-ruffled duenna.

"You know the family, then?" asked the woman, thinking she had found an opportunity of satisfying her curiosity.

Madame Desroches perceived that she had said too much. "Yes," she replied, "yes, I used to know the Marquis, her father."

H  l  ne meanwhile had descended the steps and crossed the courtyard. On reaching the outer gate she ordered it to be opened, and there upon the steps stood Gaston. He entered, and the gate was closed behind him.

"Come in, dear Gaston," said H  l  ne on seeing him. The young man followed H  l  ne across the courtyard, and they entered the house together and went into a room on the ground floor.

"You sent for me, H  l  ne, and I lost no time in coming," said the young man. "Has anything alarmed you? Does anything lead you to think you are not safe here?"

"Look around, Gaston, and judge for yourself," replied H  l  ne.

The room in which Gaston and H  l  ne found themselves was the very room where Dubois had conducted the Regent in order that he might witness his son's behaviour under provocation. It was a

charmingly appointed boudoir attached to the dining-room, with which it communicated, as the reader may remember, by two doors as well by a central opening masked by a bank of choice hot-house flowers which filled the room with their perfume. The little boudoir was decorated with pale blue satin hangings dotted with tiny roses with silver foliage; above the door were representations of the story of Venus, in four tableaux, the work of Claude Audran. Upon the first tableau, representing her birth, the goddess appeared rising above the crest of a billow: another panel was inspired by the episode of her encounter with Adonis; a third showed the punishment of the presumptuous Psyché, and last of all Vulcan appeared in the act of surprising the amorous goddess in the arms of Mars. Upon the panels of the door the same motive was further set forth, and all alike showed the same suave contours and voluptuousness of expression which left very little doubt as to the character of the apartment. Such were the pictures which Nocé, in the innocence of his heart, had declared to the Regent to be singularly modest and incapable of raising a blush upon the most prudish countenance.

"Were you not right in warning me to mistrust that man who presented himself as my father? In truth, Gaston, I feel more uneasy in this house than at Rambouillet."

Gaston examined the pictures one by one with a rising sentiment of contemptuous indignation towards the man who, as he believed, had thought by such means to undermine the delicacy of a pure-hearted girl like Héléne. He then entered the dining-room and examined it with equal attention: the decorations were conceived in a similar taste. Hence Gaston and Héléne walked into a garden adorned with statues and groups forming, in another medium, representations of those episodes in the story which the painters had omitted to commemorate. As they turned towards the house again they passed Madame Desroches who had all this time kept them in sight. She raised her hands to the skies with a despairing gesture and moaned — "Oh Heavens! what will his Highness think!"

Her words caused Gaston's pent-up wrath to burst forth like a torrent.—

"His Highness!" he cried sternly. "You heard what she said, Héléne? 'Highness,' forsooth! . . . Your fears were justified, and thank heaven! you had a presentiment of your danger. We are in the house of one of those callous-hearted libertines who purchase their pleasures at the expense of their honour. Never have I entered one of these nests of iniquity, but I can guess: those pictures, these statues, the half-light in the rooms, those arrangements for the servants so contrived that their presence may not interrupt their master's vile amusements—all this is more than enough to convince me. In Heaven's name, be no longer deceived, Héléne. I had grounds for anticipating treachery at Rambouillet; here it is plain and palpably set forth before your eyes—"

"Gracious Heaven!" cried Héléne; "if that man should come—if with the help of his servants he should forcibly detain us!"

"Calm your fears, Héléne, am I not with you?"

"Ah! what a cruel disappointment—I thought to have found a father, a protector and friend!"

"'Tis cruel indeed, and doubly cruel at this moment when you are about to be left alone in the world," said Gaston, unthinkingly revealing part of his secret.

"What are you saying, Gaston? What mean those disquieting words?"

"Nothing, nothing. . . . Idle words, pay no heed to them. I scarce knew what I said."

"Gaston, you are hiding something from me—something you fear to tell me, else why do you speak of abandoning me in my hour of need?"

"Oh! Héléne, never while I live will I abandon you!"

"Then it must be that your life is in danger," cried the girl, "and you fear that death will part you from me. Gaston, Gaston, your looks betray you—you are no longer the same as of old days. Your pleasure at our meeting to-day was mingled with restraint. Yesterday you were not greatly grieved when we parted. Your mind, I fear, is occupied with more engrossing plans than those which concern your heart. Something within you, pride or ambition, has thrust aside the love which once you held for all in all. . . . Why are you so pale? Oh!

Gaston, speak to me! You will break my heart with this silence."

"It is not so, not so, I swear it, *Hélène*! And indeed, can you wonder that I am distraught after all that has happened? When I find you alone and unfriended in this wicked house, and know not how I am to protect you? For it is certain that this man has powerful resources. Were we in Brittany, I have friends, I have tenants—two hundred, were it necessary, to protect you. Here, I have not a friend—I can count upon no one."

"Is that all, Gaston?"

"Surely it is more than enough."

"Nay, if that be all, we will leave this house together, and at once," said *Hélène*. Her eyelashes drooped sweetly, and she laid her hand confidently in her lover's.—"In face of all these people who are watching us," she continued; "before the eyes of this woman, who is that man's accomplice and is plotting infamy against me. Gaston, let us go away together."

A ray of gladness shot from Gaston's eyes; but next instant his expression was clouded by anxious thought. *Hélène* eagerly scanned his face and was quick to note the change.—"Am I not your betrothed, Gaston?" she whispered. "Is not my honour your own? Come, let us hasten from this place."

"But where to go? Where to place you in safety?"

"Gaston, I am helpless, I know nothing. Paris is strange to me—the whole world is strange—you I know and trust, and I know myself. You have shown me the gulf in front of me. I mistrust everything and everybody save you alone—your loyalty and your love."

Gaston was overwhelmed with a feeling of helplessness; he cursed the irony of circumstance which rendered him powerless to protect the courageous girl who had trusted him with so generous a devotion, to gain which, a short six months ago, he would gladly have laid down his life.

"Take time to reflect, *Hélène*," said Gaston after a pause. "If we should be wrong—if this man were indeed your father—"

"It was you, Gaston, who taught me to distrust him, have you forgotten that?"

"You are right, *Hélène*; yes, yes," cried the young man, "happen what may, let us go!"

"Whither shall we turn?" asked *Hélène*. "Nay, you need not answer me, Gaston; you will decide, and I am content." Then presently, looking towards figures of Christ and the Virgin which appeared somewhat incongruously amongst the deities of the Heathen Mythology, the girl went on, "Yet grant me one wish; swear to me on this sacred symbol that you will deal with me in all loyalty as your wife to be."

"*Hélène*," replied Gaston, "it would be unfair to you were I to swear such an oath. I have long hesitated to claim your hand—I feared lest I should wrong you in asking you to be my wife. Were I but sure of the present, my fortune, my happiness, all that I am and possess I would lay at your feet, leaving to God the care of the future. But the time has come when I must tell you: you guessed rightly just now; before to-morrow dawns a terrible blow may fall. What I am able to offer you, *Hélène*, is this: should I succeed, place and power; should I fail, flight, exile, and it may be poverty. Is your love strong enough, *Hélène*, to brave all this?"

"I am ready, Gaston. Where you lead, I will follow."

"Rest assured I will never betray your trust, *Hélène*. I cannot take you to my lodging, but I will put you under the charge of one who will defend you, if need be, and in my absence will take the place of the father whom you thought to have found and have now lost again."

"Of whom do you speak, Gaston? . . . You will not think I mistrust you," added *Hélène*, with a wistful smile; "I only ask from curiosity."

"One who can refuse me nothing—one to whom I am linked by the strongest ties, and who will think I ask but a slight favour in making him surety for your peace and security."

"More mysteries, Gaston! Really," said *Hélène*, shaking her head in playful reproach, "my mind misgives me as to our future."

"This secret shall be the last, *Hélène*. From this moment my whole life shall be open as the day."

"I thank you, Gaston."

"And now, your wishes are mine, *Hélène*."

"Then let us go." *Hélène* leaned upon the Chevalier's arm, and together they crossed the salon. Here Madame

Desroches, bristling with indignation, sat at a table scrawling a letter the destination of which may be guessed.

"Good heavens! Mademoiselle, what are you doing? Where are you going?" she demanded shrilly.

"Where am I going? . . . I am going—that is sufficient. What am I doing? . . . I am quitting a house where my honour is in jeopardy."

"What's that?" shrieked the ancient dame, jumping up as though someone had touched a spring. "You mean you are going off with your lover!"

"You are mistaken, Madame," replied Hélène with dignity. "This is my husband."

Madame Desroches in an access of terrified amazement dropped her arms inertly to her sides.

"And if a certain person of whom you know," continued Hélène, "should ask to see me, you will tell him that, however inexperienced I may be, I have discovered the snare, that I have escaped it, and that, if he should be minded to seek me, he will find that I am not without a defender."

"You shall not go out, Mademoiselle," cried the old duenna, "even if I have to employ violence to prevent you!"

"Come, Gaston," said Hélène, disdainingly to reply to the old woman's threat.

"Picard! Coutourier! Blanchot! come here, quick!" screamed the distracted Desroches, and the lackeys, full of zeal, came running forward to do her bidding.

"The first man who stands in my way, I kill!" said Gaston, quietly, as he unsheathed his blade.

"Ah! what a temper!" wailed the duenna. "She's just like the others—it's just the way Mesdemoiselles de Chartres and de Valois would have acted!" The exclamation was heard by both Hélène and Gaston, but neither understood its meaning.

"We are going now, Madame. Do not forget my message," said Hélène. Then, taking Gaston's arm, the young girl, with head fearlessly erect and with heightened colour and sparkling eyes, peremptorily ordered the front door to be opened. The footman dared not disobey. With calm deliberation the lovers crossed the hall, and, having reached the door, closed it behind them. Gaston summoned the fiacre in which he had come—then noticing that the domestics

were preparing to follow, he turned back a few steps and addressed them sternly.—"Follow me another step, and I will proclaim this infamous story aloud—I will appeal to the public sense of honour for justice and protection."

Madame Desroches could only believe from hearing this speech that the Chevalier had penetrated the mystery of Hélène's parentage and was about to reveal the names of the parties concerned. She was so far daunted by this supposition that she hastily drew back, accompanied by the whole tribe of lackeys.

The intelligent driver, without waiting for orders, whipped up his horses into a gallop.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT OCCURRED IN THE HOUSE IN THE RUE DU BAC BEFORE GASTON'S ARRIVAL.

"WHAT! you here, Monseigneur?" exclaimed Dubois as he entered the salon of the house in the Rue du Bac and found the Regent in the same place he had occupied the day before.

"Yes," replied the Regent. "Do you find it surprising? You know I have an appointment with the Chevalier for noon."

"But I imagined the warrant you signed would preclude all further conference, Monseigneur."

"You were wrong, Dubois. I wish to have another talk with that young man. I will try once more to persuade him to give up his mad design."

"And if he should agree?"

"Why, then the matter will be at an end—the conspiracy will have fallen through. Evil intentions are not a penal offence."

"If it were any other conspirator I should strongly oppose such leniency, but as it is I say, 'Have your own way.'"

"You think he will prove obstinate?"

"Oh, I haven't the least doubt. But when he has given you a decided refusal—when you are quite convinced of his determination to persist until he has properly murdered you—you will hand him over to me, eh?"

"Yes; but not here."

"Why not here?"

"Better to arrest him, at his hotel, it seems to me."

"At the *Muid d'Amour*, by M. Tapin and D'Argenson's men? 'Tis out of the question, Monseigneur; the scandal of Bourguignon's taking off is yet fresh—the whole neighbourhood has been aroused by it. Indeed, I am not sure, since Tapin has become addicted to giving exact measure, that the neighbours are altogether satisfied with the story of his predecessor's sudden attack of apoplexy. Take my word for it, Monseigneur; better catch him as he leaves this house. The house is quiet and enjoys a reputation for respectability. I told your Highness, if I am not mistaken, that it used to be occupied by a mistress of mine. Four men will be ample, and they are now stationed in readiness. I'll make a slight change in the plan of operations since you insist upon seeing the young man; instead of arresting him as he enters, they shall snap him up as he is leaving. At the door there will be a carriage—not the one which brings him—all ready to convey our conspirator to the Bastille. By this arrangement not even the man who drives him here will know what becomes of him. The only man who will be in the secret will be Monsieur Delaunay, and trust me, you may rely upon his discretion."

"You will do as you think best."

"Your Highness knows very well I always do."

"You are a most impudent little rascal!"

"But your Highness is not altogether displeased with the results of my impudence."

"Oh, I admit you are generally in the right."

"Now, with regard to the others."

"Which others?"

"Why, those Bretons of ours—Pontcalec, Du Couëdic, Talhouët and Montlouis."

"You have their names, then? Poor devils!"

"How do you suppose I spent my time at the *Muid d'Amour*?"

"But they will get wind of the arrest of their fellow-conspirator."

"By what means?"

"When they find that no more letters arrive from Paris, they will begin to suspect something is wrong."

"Pooh! What is the use of Captain La Jonquière if not to keep them amused?"

"True; but they must know his writing."

"Not at all bad, Monseigneur. Your education is progressing. However, in this case your pains are wasted: at the present moment those gentlemen in Brittany are in all probability under arrest."

"Who despatched the warrant?"

"Why, I did, *pardieu*! I am not your Minister merely for the name. And besides, you signed the warrant."

"I, indeed! You must be mad!"

"Assuredly you signed. Those men yonder are no less criminal than their fellow in Paris; and when you authorized me to arrest the one, you consented to the arrest of all."

"And how long has the bearer of the warrant been gone?"

Dubois consulted his watch. — "Just three hours. When I told your Highness just now that they were already under arrest it was a slight exercise of poetic license on my part. The fact is, they will not be arrested before to-morrow morning."

"It will cause a rising in Brittany, Dubois."

"Pooh! I have taken all necessary measures."

"No court in Brittany will ever convict their countrymen."

"That objection has been provided against."

"And even should they be condemned, it will be quite impossible to find anyone to carry out the sentence. It will be a second edition of the Chalais affair, and that also took place at Nantes, do not forget. I tell you, Dubois, the Bretons are awkward folks to deal with."

"That will be a matter for the judges to settle, Monseigneur. I have drawn up a list of judges; I will send three or four expert headsmen from Paris—men accustomed to operate upon illustrious patients and who have retained the noble traditions of Cardinal Richelieu."

"Good God!" cried the Duke. "My regency to be stained with bloodshed! I would give much to avoid it; of course I don't mean such people as Count Horn, who was a thief, or Duchauffour who was a villain. No doubt you think me soft-hearted, Dubois."

"Not soft-hearted, Monseigneur; say rather, weak and vacillating. I used to tell you that when you were my pupil, and to-day, when you are my master, I repeat it. The fairy godmother who presided at your baptism endowed you with rich gifts—strength, beauty, courage and intellect. The wicked fairy who had not been invited because she was old and ugly—no doubt they guessed you would have a horror of ugly old women—arrived at the end of the ceremony and presented you with the fatal gift of pliancy, and that spoiled all."

"Where did you hear that pretty story? Is it the invention of Perrault or of Saint-Simon?"

"Of neither, Monseigneur. I had it from the Princess Palatine, your mother."

The Regent laughed good-humouredly.—"And who are the judges you suggest to try the case?"

"Oh, trust me, Monseigneur, they are men of courage and resolution, unhampered by provincial sentiment, nor likely to be influenced by the pleadings of relatives—men accustomed to the wranglings of the courts, hard-headed and keen, not to be intimidated by the fierce looks of the men, nor to be softened by the great tearful eyes of the women."

The Regent made no reply in words, but merely shook his head and shuffled his feet. Without regarding this mute sign of opposition, Dubois continued,—
"Perhaps, after all, these people are not as guilty as we have supposed. What are the objects of their plot? Let us consider them a moment. To establish in France Spanish predominance—well, what does it amount to? 'Tis merely a case of transferring the title of king to Philip, a prince who renounced his country. To effect this they must violate every law of the land, no doubt; but that is a detail unworthy the consideration of an honest Breton gentleman——"

"Enough said, Dubois," interposed the Regent coldly. "I am as well acquainted with the laws as you."

"In that case, Monseigneur, it only rests with you to consent to the nomination of the judges I have chosen."

"How many are there?"

"Twelve."

"Their names?"

"Mabroul, Bertin, Barillon, Parissot, Brunet-d'Arcy, Pagon, Feydeau de Brou

Madorge, Héber de Buc, Saint-Aubin, De Beaussan and Aubry de Valton."

"Ah! you were right—the selection does you credit. But who is to preside over this amiable assembly?"

"Guess, Monseigneur."

"Take care; you will need a man of exceptionally good repute to be president of such a packed bench of inquisitors."

"I have chosen one of most respectable reputation."

"Who is he?"

"He is an ambassador."

"Do you by any chance allude to Cellamare?"

"No; but I dare wager if you would consent to release him from Blois he would be delighted to meet your wishes, even so far as to condemn his accomplices to death."

"He is well enough at Blois; let him stay there. Come, now, who is your president?"

"Châteauneuf."

"The Dutch Ambassador—the man whose principles were formed by the Grand Monarque! 'Pon my word I must admit—and I am not prone to flatter you unduly—I must admit you have on this occasion made a master-stroke!"

"I am glad you see my point, Monseigneur. Those people yonder indulge in republican ideals; and Châteauneuf, trained as he was under an autocratic régime, has absorbed the sentiment of hatred in which Louis XIV held all republics. Indeed, he accepted the office of president with enthusiasm. Unquestionably we must have Argram to take charge of the prosecution, and Cayet as recorder. It would be well to begin proceedings without delay, for the matter is urgent, Monseigneur."

"And when this matter is settled, may we expect peace in future?"

"I have full confidence that we may. Thereafter we may slumber peacefully every day and all day—that is to say, when we have ended the war in Spain and accomplished the reduction of the paper currency. In the latter task you will have the assistance of that financial genius, your friend John Law. Such matters fall within his province and do not concern me."

"What an accumulation of anxieties! What devil could have induced me to

seek the Regency! How I should have enjoyed watching M. de Maine struggling in the tangles of his Jesuits and his Spaniards! To have seen Madame de Maintenon's petty intrigues with Villeroy and Villars would have provided us with endless amusement—and Humbert tells me it is conducive to health to have at least one good laugh a day.”

“Speaking of Madame de Maintenon,” said Dubois, “of course you have heard, Monseigneur, that the excellent lady is very ill and not expected to survive the next fortnight!”

“Nonsense!”

“Since the incarceration of Madame de Maine and the banishment of her husband, Madame de Maintenon's conviction that King Louis XIV. is no more has become intensified, and she has been tearfully preparing to rejoin him.”

“That would not grieve you overmuch, I suspect.”

“Oh! I don't mind owning that I detest the woman. I know it was her influence which prompted the late king to stare me out of countenance when I asked for my cardinal's hat upon the occasion of your marriage, and, upon my word! your marriage was no easy matter to arrange, as you know. Really, if your Highness had not been there to redress the wrongs done me by the King, that woman would have spoiled my career! Therefore you may suppose if I had been able to entangle her dear M. de Maine in this Brittany plot. . . . But, 'pon my honour, it couldn't be done. The poor man is scared almost out of his wits, and indeed, I'm told he has been saying to everybody who will listen, 'There has actually been a conspiracy against the government, and especially against the Regent. Why, it is a national scandal! Ah, if everybody were like I am—!’”

“There would be no conspiracies, that is certain,” rejoined the Regent, smiling.

“He has disowned his wife,” added Dubois with a chuckle.

“And she has retaliated by disowning him,” replied the Regent, joining in the laugh.

“I would certainly not advise you to imprison them together. They would come to blows.”

“Therefore I have sent the one to Doulens and the other to Dijon.”

“Whence they will rend each other by letter.”

“Well, let that pass, Dubois.”

“Until the inevitably fatal consequences ensue? What a bloodthirsty idea! You have evidently vowed that the blood of Louis XIV. shall flow.”

The Regent frowned. The audacious jest proved how great was the ascendancy exercised over his master by Dubois, for had it been uttered by any other than he, it would not have been thus lightly passed over. Dubois now presented for the prince's signature the order nominating the judges, to which the Regent made no difficulty about attaching his name.

Delighted with his success, though outwardly indifferent, Dubois quitted the Regent in order to give directions for the Chevalier's arrest.

Meanwhile Gaston, after leaving the house in the Faubourg, had returned in the fiacre to his hotel, where, it will be remembered, he was to find a carriage waiting to conduct him to the rendezvous with the Duke of Olivarez in the Rue du Bac. He found the carriage already on the spot when he reached the *Muid-d'Amour*, and also the man who had acted as guide the day before. Thinking it unnecessary for Hélène to change carriages, Gaston suggested to the man that the journey might be made in the fiacre; the mysterious guide signified his acquiescence, and mounted the box seat with the driver, to whom he gave directions as to their destination.

A prey to anxious thought, Gaston's taciturnity during the drive, and his careworn expression of face could not but have a saddening effect upon Hélène's spirits. Judging him by her own feelings, she had expected to find support in the courage and cheerfulness of her lover; but in place of that it seemed as though he were oppressed by a deep melancholy of which he was unwilling to explain the cause. Piqued by this strange behaviour on Gaston's part,—“Oh!” she cried at length, “you make me dread the time to come, lest you should fail me when I have need of all my belief in you!”

“Ere long you will see that I am acting for the best, Hélène,” replied Gaston. As he spoke, the fiacre drew up at its destination. “In this house,” continued Gaston, “you will find one who will take the place of a father. Suffer me to leave you awhile. I go and prepare him to welcome you.”

In spite of herself and scarce knowing

why, Hélène began to feel frightened. "Oh!" she cried, laying a hand on Gaston's arm, "must you leave me here alone?"

"Fear nothing, Hélène," replied Gaston. "In a moment I will return for you." He kissed her hand, and as he turned away a pang shot through him almost as of self-reproach. It seemed as though in quitting Hélène he was failing in a lover's duty towards her.

Meanwhile the gate had been opened and the man on the box had signed to the driver to enter, whereupon the gate was immediately reclosed behind the fiacre. Gaston felt assured that Hélène was perfectly secure within the courtyard enclosed with high walls; and moreover, there was no other plan which he could put in practice. The same man who had come to find him at the *Muid d'Amour* opened the door of the fiacre. Pressing the girl's hand for the last time, he sprang out, and following his guide, mounted the staircase leading to the hall. As on the previous day he was led into the corridor, and there, after pointing out the door leading to the salon, the guide left him. Wishing to lose no time since Hélène was awaiting his return, Gaston at once tapped at the door.

"Come in," cried a voice which Gaston recognized as that of the Spaniard—a voice too deeply impressed upon his memory for him to be mistaken. He accordingly entered, and found himself in the presence of the chief of the conspiracy; but this time without any trace of that nervous excitement he had experienced the day before. This time Gaston felt master of himself, and he approached the Duc d'Olivarez with quiet calmness, carrying himself proudly erect.

"You are punctual, sir," said the pretended Spaniard, looking round with a smile. "The appointment was for noon, and it is this moment striking." As he spoke, the clock upon the mantelpiece, against which the Regent was leaning, began sounding the twelve strokes.

"'Tis because my business brooks no delay, Monseigneur," replied Gaston. "The mission with which I am charged weighs upon me—I fear lest I should be assailed by remorse. . . . The confession may well surprise and alarm you, Monseigneur. But rest assured that any such feeling of remorse will not affect the enterprise, but only myself."

"Troth, I think I perceive signs of drawing back," cried the Regent with a certain eagerness in his tone he could not altogether conceal.

"You are mistaken, Monseigneur. Since it fell to my lot to strike down the Prince, I have gone forward without wavering, nor shall I halt or look back until my object has been accomplished."

"It seems to me, however, that your words indicated some hesitancy; and with certain people one attaches great weight to such shades of expression, especially in circumstances like the present."

"In our province, Monseigneur, men are accustomed to speak as they think, and it is equally the custom for them to act as they speak."

"You are quite determined, then?"

"More than ever, your Excellency."

"Because, you know, there is still time," continued the Regent; "the evil has not yet been committed and——"

"You call it an evil, Monseigneur," interrupted Gaston, smiling sadly; "by what name then should I call it?"

"'Twas from your point of view I was regarding it," rejoined the Regent quickly. "For you 'tis an evil, since you already begin to feel remorse."

"Monseigneur, you would not be so ungenerous as to confound me with words spoken in confidence—a confidence prompted by the high esteem in which I hold your Excellency—a confidence, moreover, I would certainly not have made to any other man."

"Nay, 'tis because I fully appreciate your worth that I remind you there is still time to draw back—that I ask if you have quite reflected, if you have not repented mixing yourself up with all these . . ." The Duke hesitated a moment, and then resumed,—“with these bold enterprises. Fear nothing from me—I will protect you even to the last. I have seen you but once, but I think I have formed a correct judgment of you. Men of worth are so rare that all the regrets will be on our side.”

"Your kindness overwhelms me, Monseigneur," said Gaston, in whose heart a feeling of revolt against the terrible duty he had undertaken was combating with his will.—“It is not that I am hesitating, your Highness; 'tis only that I feel in the same position that a duellist feels when he takes his place on the ground fully determined to kill his opponent, yet

deploring the harsh necessity which forces him to take the life of a fellow-creature."

Gaston paused, and the Prince regarded him with sharp scrutiny, seeking to discover some signs of the change of purpose for which he hoped. After a moment the Chevalier continued,—“But in the present case the interests at stake are so great—so far transcending the mere weakness of human nature—that I shall without any doubt obey the convictions of my reason and the mandates of my friends, if not my own sympathies. My conduct of the affair will be such, Monseigneur, that you will not despise the temporary weakness which for a moment restrained my arm.”

“Very well,” said the Regent; “but tell me, what method will you adopt?”

“I shall wait until I have an opportunity of meeting him face to face and then . . . I shall not employ an arquebuse, as Poltrot did, nor a pistol, like Vitry; I will say to him, ‘Monseigneur, you are oppressing France—down with the tyrant!’ and I will strike at him with my dagger.”

“After the manner of Ravallac,” remarked the Duke without moving an eyelid. His coolness chilled Gaston, who drooped his head without replying.—“Your plan appears to me more certain, and I approve of it,” continued the Regent. “There is one question, though, I must ask you. If you should be caught, and they should question you?”

“Your Highness knows what is to be done in such cases: one dies, but gives no answer. And since you have mentioned Ravallac, he, if I remember rightly, acted thus; yet Ravallac was not of gentle birth.”

Gaston’s proud answer did not displease the Regent, in whom the heart of youth with its chivalrous feelings had not been extinguished by the lapse of years. Moreover, to a man who had become habituated to the effeminate and self-seeking natures of courtiers with whom he was in daily contact, the manly directness of the Chevalier was a novelty; and it is well known that a love of novelty was a distinguishing trait in the Regent’s character. He remained thoughtfully silent, or rather, as though he found difficulty in deciding, he appeared as though he wished to gain time.

“I may take it, then,” the Regent said

at length, “that nothing will shake your resolution?”

Gaston could not help feeling surprised that his companion should always return to the same question. In spite of himself, his face reflected his astonishment, and the Regent noticed it.—“Yes, I perceive you are firmly resolved,” added the Duke in the same tone.

“Unquestionably,” replied Gaston. “I have now only to await your Excellency’s final instructions.”

“How? my final instructions.”

“Very simply. I have as yet received no indication as to your Highness’s will in this matter, although I have placed myself at your disposal body and soul.”

The Regent rose from his seat.—“Well,” he said, “since the affair must come to a climax, I will tell you what you have to do. You will leave this room by yonder door and cross the garden. A carriage will be in waiting at the farther gate, and there you will find my secretary, who will provide you with a pass which will give you access to the Regent.”

“That is all I require, Monseigneur,” rejoined Gaston.

“Have you anything further to say to me?”

“I have. Before saying my last adieu to your Highness, whom in all probability I shall not meet again in this world, I have a favour to ask of you.”

“What is it?” asked the Regent.

“Speak,—I am all attention.”

“Monseigneur,” replied Gaston, “do not wonder if I seem to hesitate; for this is no ordinary service—no personal favour—I am about to ask. Gaston de Chanlay has need of nothing but his dagger, and here you see it. But in casting away his life he would not lose his soul. My soul, Monseigneur, is to God first, and next, it belongs to the girl whom I love with all my being. A sad love story, you will say, to have sprung into life beneath the shadow of a tomb. . . . ’Tis no matter; but to abandon that sweet, trusting soul would be a base and cowardly act, unforgivable in the sight of God, though sometimes He tries us sorely, and permits even His holy angels to suffer. It has been my high privilege on this earth to gain the love of a noble-hearted girl and to protect her from the snares laid by villains. What will become of her when I am dead or far away? . . . Our heads may fall,

we who are but plain gentlemen; but you, Monseigneur, are a powerful adversary supported by a powerful monarch—you will triumph over evil fortune, beyond a doubt. Thus it is my earnest wish to place under the protection of your strong arm this tender creature who is my very soul. For the sake of the man with whom you are associated in a desperate enterprise—for the sake of your accomplice, you will not refuse me the boon I crave."

"Indeed and indeed I promise it!" cried the Regent, deeply affected.

"Nor is this all, Monseigneur. When calamity overtakes me it would afford me happiness to know that, although I cannot protect her myself, she has still the support of my name. Were I to die to-day, she would be penniless, for she is an orphan. Before I left Nantes I made a will leaving her all I possess. Monseigneur, when I die, my thought is that she ought to be my widow... Could this wish be gratified?"

"What prevents it?"

"It may be that I shall be arrested to-morrow—this very day, as I leave this house." The Regent started, for Gaston's words seemed like a presentiment.—"Should I be conducted to the Bastille, could you, as an act of grace, obtain for me permission to marry her before I am led to the scaffold?"

"Surely," replied the Duke:

"You will do your utmost to obtain this favour for me? Swear it, Monseigneur, and I will bless your name. I will think of you with gratitude even when under the torture."

"I promise it on my honour," said the Regent, moved with pity for the young man. "I will regard this girl's welfare as a sacred trust; I will transfer to her all the affection which I cannot help feeling towards yourself."

"I thank you, Monseigneur. And now, one last word."

"Speak, sir; I am listening with the deepest sympathy."

"This girl knows nothing of my plans—she is ignorant of the object which brings me to Paris and the catastrophe which threatens us, for I had not the courage to tell her. You, Monseigneur, will break it to her. As for myself, I shall not see her again except before the altar. Were I to see her when the moment comes for striking the blow, my arm

would perhaps be unnerved. That must not happen."

"I repeat to you on my word of honour," said the Regent, moved beyond all power of expression, "not only will I hold the trust sacred, but I will act toward her as you yourself would wish. The respect and affection I feel for you shall be hers, I swear it."

"You have given me new strength, Monseigneur."

"And where is this lady?"

"She is waiting in the carriage which brought me. Suffer me now to withdraw, Monseigneur, and tell me only, where will she be placed?"

"This house shall be hers; it is unoccupied, and it would be difficult to find a house more suitable for a young girl."

"Monseigneur, your hand."

The Regent grasped the young man's hand warmly, and it may be that he was about to renew the attempt to turn him from his purpose; but at that moment a dry cough was heard outside the door, making the Duke understand that Dubois was growing impatient. Accordingly he took a step forward to indicate to Gaston that the audience was over.

"Once again," said Gaston, "I beg you guard that child. She is pretty and gentle, sensitive to kindness... a sweet and proud disposition such as one rarely meets... Farewell, Monseigneur, I go to find your secretary."

"Must I then tell her that you are about to take a man's life?" said the Regent, making a last effort to restrain him.

"It must be so, Monseigneur," replied the Chevalier. "Only I beg you to add that I kill him to save my country."

"Go, then, Monsieur," said the Duke, opening a door which led into the garden. "Follow the path I have indicated."

"Wish me good fortune, Monseigneur."

The door closed behind him.

"Ah! the mad young fool!" cried the Regent, sorrowfully. "And he asks me to wish success to my own assassination... Nay, I'll be hanged if I do!" He laughed ruefully.

Gaston was crossing the garden. The gravel, thinly covered with snow, crunched beneath his heel. The Regent stood watching him from the windows in the corridor; at length, when he was lost to

ight,—“Well, every man must follow his own path. . . . Poor lad! poor lad!”

Returning to the salon, the Regent found Dubois, who had entered by another door, awaiting him.

Dubois wore an expression of mischievous satisfaction which did not escape the Duke. The Regent regarded him for some time in silence, as though he were seeking to discover what was passing in the mind of his Mephistophelean minister. Dubois was the first to speak. “Well, Monseigneur,” he said, “you have got rid of him at last—at any rate, I hope so.”

“I have,” replied the Regent; “but in a manner I dislike strongly, Dubois. I am not over fond of taking a part in your comedies, let me tell you.”

“’Tis very possible; but you would perhaps be acting wisely if you gave me a part in yours.”

“How is that?”

“They would be better assured of success, and the dénouements would be arranged more artistically.”

“I have no idea of what you mean. Come, explain! Let us hear what you have to say, and briefly—I have to receive someone who is waiting.”

“Oh! receive that individual by all means, Monseigneur. Our little conversation can wait. The dénouement of your comedy has been accomplished in all its crudeness, and nothing I could do now would mend or mar it.”

Dubois accompanied his speech with the ironical bow which the Regent had grown accustomed to expect when, in the course of the interminable game they played one against the other, Dubois held the winning cards. Accordingly the Regent always felt uncomfortably apprehensive whenever he observed his Minister in an attitude of mock deference. “Come, what is the matter now?” asked the Duke with studied unconcern. “What is this fresh discovery you have made?”

“I have discovered that you are a skilful dissimulator.”

“A great surprise for you, no doubt.”

“I am not so much surprised as grieved. When you have become a little more proficient in the art you will perform wonders. You will have no further need of me then, except to superintend your son’s education. It would certainly be greatly to his advantage to have such a master.”

“Come to the point, Dubois.”

“You are right, Monseigneur, seeing that the matter in hand does not concern your son, but your daughter.”

“Which of my daughters?”

“Ah, yes; of course, you have several. In the first place, there is the Abbess of Chelles. Secondly, Madame de Berri. Thirdly, Mlle. de Valois; and then the others, who are too young to have engaged people’s attention, therefore I need not speak of them. Finally, there is that sweet blossom from Brittany—that shy wild flower so carefully sheltered from the devastating influence of the unspeakable ruffian Dubois, for fear his poisonous breath should blast it.”

“Have you impudence enough to say I was wrong?”

“Can you suspect it? Monseigneur, you have succeeded admirably. Naturally, you shrank from confiding in the blackguardly Dubois, and I commend your judgment; naturally also, since the Archbishop of Cambrai is no more, you find a worthy substitute in the good and pure, the saintly and innocent Nocé, and to him you apply for the loan of his house.”

“Ah! you have found out that, have you?” said the Regent.

“And such a house! Blameless and unsophisticated as its owner. Yes, Monseigneur, yes, your direction of the affair has been most judicious. The child must at all hazard be guarded from the sinful world—she must be screened from every influence which might tend to rub off the bloom of her youthful innocence. That is the reason why we have chosen this dwelling for her, this austere sanctuary where may be seen on every hand the gods, heroes and heroines of Classic story—priests and priestesses of Virtue—practising, with the graceful freedom from conventional restraints so delightfully characteristic of the golden age, the cult of every heathen abomination,—Ledas, Erigones and Danaes, swans, bunches of grapes and showers of gold!”

“Good heavens! and that rascal of a Nocé assured me there was nothing more than a few pictures of shepherdesses by Mignard.”

“But you must surely know the house, Monseigneur?”

“Do you suppose I look at such things?”

"Of course not. I was forgetting—you are short-sighted."

"Dubois!"

"And then the furniture—the problematical couches, the strangely-garnished dressing-tables,—what will your daughter make of all this? To say nothing of the books—ah, 'tis for his books adapted for the instruction of youth that brother Nocé is justly famous! They would form an excellent set of higher-grade text-books supplementing M. de Bussy-Rabutin's *Breviary*, of which I presented you with a copy, you will remember, Monseigneur, on your twelfth birthday."

"Man without shame, you did."

"In short, the whole place is governed by a spirit of the most strait-laced prudery. 'Twas the place of all others I chose for your son's education; but 'tis plain that your Highness and I regard things from different points of view, since you considered it suitable for your daughter's spiritual needs."

"Have done, Dubois," said the Regent, crossly. "You weary me with your tedious sarcasms."

"I am just finishing, Monseigneur,—*incedo ad finem*. Your daughter no doubt will be much improved by her stay in that house; since, like all those of your blood, she is gifted with keen intelligence."

The Regent moved uneasily. He readily guessed that Dubois' tortuous preamble and mocking tones signified that he was the bearer of disagreeable tidings.

"And yet," continued Dubois, "notwithstanding all these advantages,—pray observe, Monseigneur, to what lengths a spirit of contradiction will carry one—she became dissatisfied with the dwelling so thoughtfully chosen for her by paternal wisdom. She is leaving it."

"What's that you say, man?"

"Stay, I'm wrong. She has already changed her place of abode."

"My daughter has left!" cried the Duke, alarmed.

"Precisely," said Dubois.

"Which way?"

"Why, by the door.—Oh! she is not one of those young ladies who slip away at night by the windows. No, indeed. She is very certainly of your blood, Monseigneur. Had I ever been inclined to doubt it for an instant, I should now be convinced."

"But what of Madame Desroches?"

"Madame Desroches is at the Palais-Royal. I have only this moment left her. She came to impart the news to your Highness."

"How came she to permit it?"

"Mademoiselle gave her commands."

"Desroches ought to have had the doors fastened by the lackeys. They did not know she was my daughter, and had no reason to obey her orders."

"The Desroches woman was afraid of your daughter's anger; but it was the sword which terrified the lackeys."

"The sword! What do you mean, Dubois? Have you been drinking?"

"Likely indeed I should become intoxicated on a decoction of chicory! No, Monseigneur; if I am intoxicated, 'tis only with admiration of your perspicacity when you take the management of an affair entirely in your own hands."

"But you spoke of a sword—what sword? What do you mean?"

"The sword which Mademoiselle has at her disposal, belonging to a young gentleman of charming manners—"

"Dubois!"

"Who is strongly attached to her."

"Dubois, you will drive me beyond endurance!"

"Who followed her from Nantes to Rambouillet with the utmost gallantry."

"Monsieur de Livry?"

"Oh, you know the name! Then what I am telling you is no news."

"This is too much, Dubois—I am overwhelmed."

"You have cause, Monseigneur. See now what it is to manage your private affairs, when at the same time you are occupied by the affairs of France."

"Where is she, though?"

"Ah! where indeed! How should I be expected to know?"

"Dubois, it is you who have told me of her flight; now I look to you for tidings of her whereabouts. Dubois, my dear Dubois, find me my daughter!"

"Now upon my word, Monseigneur, you are speaking exactly like one of Molière's doting fathers, and I am like Scapin! Ah! *mon bon Scapin, mon cher Scapin, mon petit Scapin, retrouve-moi ma fille*. Why, Monseigneur, Géronte could not beat you! Well, well, we will search for your daughter. She shall be found; and swift vengeance

shall be inflicted upon the rascally ravisher."

"Find her, Dubois, and ask of me what you please."

"Now you are speaking to some purpose."

The Regent had dropped listlessly into a chair, where he sat with his head supported by his two hands. Dubois left him to his harrowing reflections; indeed, the Duke's state of mind was the cause of subdued rejoicing to his Minister, who clearly saw that the more serious the view which the Regent took of the matter, the more greatly would his own influence be enhanced. In anticipation of this pleasing result, Dubois' features wore an engaging smirk as he covertly regarded his master, when all at once a light tap was heard at the door.

"Who's there?" asked Dubois.

The answer came from a footman outside the door.—"Monseigneur, there is a young lady waiting below in the fiacre in which the Chevalier arrived. She has asked to be informed whether he will be long, and if she is to continue waiting."

Dubois made a spring towards the door; but too late, for the Regent, to whom the footman's message had recalled the solemn promise he had just made to Gaston, had at once risen.

"Where are you going, Monseigneur?" asked Dubois.

"To receive that lady," replied the Regent.

"That concerns me—that is not your affair. Do not forget, Monseigneur, that you have left me to deal with this conspiracy."

"I have left you to deal with the Chevalier, it is true; but I promised the Chevalier to act as a father towards the girl he loves. I gave him my word, and I must keep it. Since I am sending her lover to his death, the least I can do is to offer the girl such consolation as lies in my power."

"I'll undertake all that," said Dubois, hastily. He was seriously perturbed by this unforeseen development, but endeavoured to conceal his anxiety beneath a smile of diabolical assurance.

"Hold your tongue, and stay where you are," replied the Regent, with decision. "You mean playing me some dog's trick, I'm convinced."

"What the devil! At least, Monseigneur, you will let me speak to her."

"I will speak to her myself. These things concern me personally and have nothing to do with you. I have given my word of honour. Enough said. You will stay here."

Dubois bit his nails to the quick; but he knew from his master's tone that it would be useless to attempt further remonstrance. With deep chagrin he found himself obliged to obey, and, leaning his back against the mantelpiece, he waited. Soon the rustling of a silken robe was heard on the other side of the door. "Yes, Madame, it is this door," said the footman's voice.

"Here she is," said the Regent. "Remember one thing, Dubois; this young girl is in no way answerable for her lover's conduct; therefore you will treat her with every consideration." Then, turning in the direction whence the voice had been heard, he cried,—"Come in."

At this invitation the door opened suddenly, a young woman entered and advanced a few steps towards the Regent. Her appearance had a singular effect upon the Duke, who started back as though thunder-struck. "My daughter!" he muttered, seeking to regain his self-command, whilst Héléne, after glancing round in the hope of seeing Gaston, was making her bow.

As for Dubois, his ape-like grimace may be imagined.

"Forgive me, sir," said Héléne, "if perchance I have made a mistake. I am looking for a friend who left me to wait for him in the carriage until he returned. He remained so long away that I have ventured to enquire for him. I was brought here, but possibly it was a mistake on the part of the footman."

"No, Mademoiselle," replied the Duke; "M. le Chevalier de Chanlay has but this moment left me, and I was expecting you."

Whilst the Regent was speaking, the girl, forgetting for a moment her pre-occupation with regard to Gaston, appeared to be making an effort to recall certain memories; at length, as though answering her own thoughts,—"Good heavens! how strange!" she breathed.

"What is it?" asked the Regent.

"Yes, it must indeed be so!"

"Nay, I do not understand what you wish to say."

"Oh! sir," said Héléne in a trembling

voice, "it is strange how your voice reminds me of the voice of someone——" Hélène checked herself in some embarrassment.

"Of someone you know?" asked the Regent.

"Someone whom I met only on one occasion, but whose tones have remained deeply imprinted upon my memory."

"And who was this person?" asked the Regent. Dubois, on his side, expressed his sense of the incongruity of this half-recognition by shrugging his shoulders.

"He called himself my father," replied Hélène.

"I congratulate myself upon this chance, Mademoiselle," said the Regent; "since you have noticed a resemblance between my voice and the voice of one whom doubtless you hold dear, it will serve perhaps to lend weight to the words I am about to speak. I think you know that M. le Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay has done me the honour of choosing me to act as your guardian."

"He told me at least that he was taking me to one who would have the power to shield me from the dangers which surround me."

"What is the danger which threatens you?" enquired the Regent.

Hélène threw a glance around her, and her eyes rested uneasily upon Dubois. There was no mistaking the significance of her expression; and, indeed, Dubois' face inspired distrust as naturally as that of the Regent appeared to promise sympathy.

"Monseigneur," said Dubois in a low tone, for he quite appreciated the meaning of Hélène's glance, "I fancy I am rather in the way here, so I will go. You do not require my presence for any other matter, I take it?"

"No, but I shall want to speak to you again in a moment. Don't go too far away."

"I shall hold myself at your Highness's orders."

This short dialogue was spoken in a tone too low for it to reach Hélène's ears even had she not, from a natural sense of delicacy, moved aside to avoid overhearing. She glanced continually towards the doors in the hope that she might see Gaston entering. The certainty that her expectation was doomed to disappointment afforded Dubois malicious consolation as

he found himself compelled to retire. He wrathfully resented the sorry trick the girl had played upon him in having returned to her father as it were of her own accord, and thus having lost him the opportunity of earning the substantial gratitude of the Regent.

After Dubois' departure both the Duke and Hélène felt more at their ease. "Be seated, Mademoiselle," said the Duke. "Our conversation will be somewhat lengthy, for I have many things to speak of."

"Permit me one question first of all," said Hélène. "Is the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay in any danger?"

"We will return to that subject in a moment, Mademoiselle. Let us begin by speaking of yourself, since he has brought you to me in order to place you under my protection. Tell me, if you please, how and by whom you are threatened, so that I may take effective measures for your security."

"Indeed, I am scarcely able to tell you. . . . Such strange things have occurred these last few days that I scarce know whom I have to fear or in whom I should confide. . . . If Gaston were here——"

"I understand: if he should counsel you to speak to me openly, you would no longer hesitate. Well, suppose I could convince you that I am acquainted with nearly all the circumstances which concern you?"

"Can it be possible, Monseigneur——"

"Aye, you shall hear. Your name is Hélène de Chaverny, is it not? You were reared at the Augustinian Convent between Nantes and Clisson. You left the convent in compliance with an order from an unknown protector, travelling in the company of one of the sisters, to whom you presented one hundred louis as a thank-offering to the convent. Awaiting you at Rambouillet was a woman named Desroches. She told you to expect a visit from your father; and that very evening he arrived—an affectionate father, who believed in your affection for him. Am I right?"

"Yes, Monsieur, all happened as you have said," replied Hélène, astonished to find this stranger so well acquainted with the details of her story.

"The following day," continued the Regent, "you were visited by M. de Chanlay, who had followed you under the

name of De Livry. Madame Desroches objected to your receiving him, but was over-ruled."

"That is quite true, Monsieur, and I perceive that you have learned everything from Gaston."

"You then received directions to come to Paris. Against your will, you obeyed, since you knew not what else to do. You were taken to a house in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where your captivity soon became unbearable."

"You describe my detention in that house as *captivity*. Say rather *imprisonment*, Monsieur."

"There I am at a loss to understand——"

"Did not Gaston tell you of his fears?—fears which at first I tried to combat, but was at length obliged to share."

"Of this he told me nothing. Tell me, I beg of you, what fears could you possibly entertain?"

"But if Gaston has not explained, how am I to make you understand?"

"Surely there is nothing one cannot confide to a friend?"

"And did he not tell you that the man whom at first I believed to be my father—

"You *believed* to be —!"

"Ah, yes; indeed I did believe it, Monsieur! When I heard his voice and felt the clasp of his hand I was sure of it, and I felt that I could love him dearly. And oh! I could not and would not believe I had been so cruelly duped—it needed all that I have since discovered—without convincing proof I would not—"

"Still I do not understand, Made-moiselle. Pray tell me what happened to cause you to fear a man who, as you tell me, appeared so full of affection towards you."

"Ah, how can I explain! . . . You know, Monsieur, that I was obliged to leave Rambouillet to go to Paris—I was sent for under a pretext—and I was placed in that house. . . . That house opened my eyes to dreadful dangers more clearly than Gaston's words of warning. I knew that I was lost if I stayed there. All the pretended affection of a father was but a mask to conceal the designs of a villain. I had no friend in the world but Gaston—I wrote to him and he came."

Although the Regent had partly anticipated this explanation, his daughter's words relieved his mind of a lurking suspicion he had been unable to overcome—the suspicion that Hélène's object in quitting the house had been rather to elope with her lover than to escape the toils of an imaginary seducer. In the revulsion of his feelings, the Duke came near betraying himself.

"If, after what I had seen, I could still have believed he was my father," continued Hélène, "even though I had seen him but once—and that one visit full of mysterious precautions on his part—I assure you, Monsieur, that nothing would have persuaded me to do or think aught that might wound him, or seem wanting in the duty which a daughter owes to a parent."

"My dear child!" cried the Regent with a warmth which startled Hélène.

"Then Gaston spoke to me of one who would protect me for his sake—he said I should find in him a true father. Gaston made me come with him here, saying that soon he would return for me. . . . For more than an hour I have been waiting, waiting, but he did not come back. . . . I began to feel alarmed for him and I sent to make enquiries."

An expression of concern again clouded the Regent's brow.—"So, then," he began, seeking to give the conversation a turn, "it was Gaston who influenced you to abandon your duty—it was he who first put those thoughts into your head?"

"Yes; he was uneasy on my account when he heard of that man's mysterious behaviour, for he suspected a fatal snare was being laid for me."

"But still, in order to convince you, ought he not at least to have shown some proof?"

"What other proof was needed than that house of infamy? Would any father have placed his daughter in such a house?"

"Yes, yes," muttered the Regent, "you are right. At the best it shewed great negligence. All the same I am convinced that you, in the innocence of your heart, would have suspected nothing wrong, had it not been for the Chevalier's suggestions."

"Indeed, I should have remained in ignorance; but happily Gaston was able to warn me."

"I am rejoiced to hear you say that!" cried the Regent. "Now, my child, listen to me—take the advice of a friend, of one old enough to be your father. Leave the Chevalier to follow his own devices, since he chooses to ruin himself. Have no more to do with him. Fortunately you have not yet gone too far to draw back."

"Abandon him when he is in danger! Nay, Monsieur. . . . Your words plainly indicate that some danger, I know not what, is threatening him. . . . We are all in all to one another. Gaston's parents are dead, and I have no parents, none at least who care what becomes of me. If ruin overtake Gaston. I will share his ruin; and there is no one to whom our fate will cost a tear. Monseigneur, I was deceiving you. I tell you now that I am his accomplice; whatever crime Gaston may have committed, or intends to commit, I will share his guilt."

A careworn expression settled upon the Duke's face. He could no longer doubt the strength and sincerity of his daughter's love for the man who was about to pay the penalty of his crime. As the conviction forced itself upon the Regent, his last hope of effecting a breach between the lovers died within him. Hélène glanced wonderingly at her companion, unable to understand why he should be so deeply affected by the sorrows of a stranger. Composing his features, the Duke returned to the attack, although he felt it to be hopeless.—"But had you not almost decided to give him up?" he asked. "Did you not tell him the other day—the day you separated—that the engagement must end, because you were no longer free to dispose of your affections?"

"Yes, I did say it, Monseigneur," answered Hélène. "Because I believed him happy—because I had no thought of his danger. I knew not that his liberty, perhaps his life, was in jeopardy." Carried away by the generous warmth of her feelings, a thrill of emotion ran through the girl's speech.—"True, the parting would have cost my heart a bitter pang, but my conscience would have been clear. I should have regarded it as a sorrow to be bravely faced, knowing that I had nothing to reproach myself with. But now that he is in trouble, now that he is unhappy, my heart tells me that

if harm should come to him, it would strike me equally, for my life is bound up in his."

"I am inclined to think you are deceiving yourself. You exaggerate the strength of your affection," persisted the Regent, anxious to discover his daughter's feelings beyond the possibility of doubt.—"Absence would very soon cure you."

"Never, Monseigneur!" cried Hélène. "My parents left me to be brought up among strangers, and the love which came to me in my loneliness has filled my whole existence—it is my sole hope of earthly happiness. Ah, Monseigneur, if you have any influence with him—and I think you have, for he has given you the confidence withheld from me—persuade him, I entreat you, to give up those dark designs of which you speak. Say what I can never say to him myself, that I love him, I love him beyond the power of words to express. Tell him that whatever his fate may be, I will share it—if he must wander in exile, I will be by his side—a prisoner, I will be a captive also—even death itself shall not part us. Tell him all this, Monsieur, and tell him also that . . . that you were a witness to my tears and know I am sincere."

"Poor, unhappy child!" murmured the Regent with tender commiseration. And indeed, Hélène's position was one to excite unmixed pity in anyone less cruelly circumstanced than the Duke. Her grief was manifest in the paleness of her cheeks; while she was speaking, her tears flowed quietly, rendering the words she uttered irresistibly pathetic. It was impossible to doubt that she had spoken in the full sincerity of her heart, or that she would perform all that she had undertaken.—"I give you my promise," said the Duke, after a moment's thought, "that I will do whatever lies in my power to save the Chevalier from his fate."

Hélène made an impulsive movement to throw herself at the Regent's feet. Her proud soul had learned humility from the stress of her apprehension of her lover's impending danger. The Regent leaned forward quickly and caught her in his arms. He felt her tremble throughout her whole frame, but it was the reaction from despair to a feeling of hope, and almost of joy, as she felt the pressure of the Regent's clasp. She leaned trust-

ingly upon the Regent's arm, without making an effort to disengage herself, whilst he regarded her with an expression of tenderness which would certainly have betrayed him, had their eyes met.

"We must give our attention first of all to what is most urgent," continued the Duke, "I have said that Gaston was in danger. It is true; but the danger is not immediate. Therefore let us think of you first; for it seems to me that, alone as you are, your position is precarious—not to say equivocal. You have been entrusted to my care; and it is my first duty as a responsible father of a family to see that you are suitably provided for. You trust me, do you not, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Did not Gaston himself bring me to you?"

"Always *Gaston*! Confound the fellow!" muttered the Duke beneath his breath. Then aloud he continued,—
"You will live in this house. It is quiet and inconspicuous, and you will feel quite free. By way of distraction, you will find a good library of books; and if my presence is agreeable, I shall be at your service." Héléne was about to express her thanks, but the Regent resumed quickly,—
"And no doubt you will have an opportunity of speaking to the Chevalier."

Héléne lowered her eyes and the Duke continued,—
"The chapel of the convent close by will always be open to you; and should any more fears such as you have already experienced assail you, the convent itself will afford you a refuge. The Mother Superior is a friend of mine."

"Oh! Monsieur," cried Héléne, "I am quite reassured. I accept with gratitude your offer of this house; and your great kindness towards Gaston and myself will ever render your presence agreeable to me."

The Regent bowed smilingly—"Well, then, Mademoiselle," he said with kindly briskness, "you can consider you are in your own house. There is a bedroom, I fancy, adjoining this salon. Commodious basement and all that—usual offices—how runs the jargon? I'll provide you with a couple of Nuns from the Convent this very evening. You would sooner have 'em than the common run of serving-maids, eh?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur."

"Do I understand," said the Regent, his briskness deserting him, and speaking with a certain degree of hesitation, "do I understand that you have . . . that you intend . . . in short, that you have quite made up your mind to renounce your father?"

"Ah, do you not understand, Monsieur, that it is from fear lest he prove not to be my father—?"

"Still, nothing so far has proved it. 'Tis only that house—I know it affords strong presumption, but it may be that he knew nothing of it."

"Oh! it seems almost impossible!"

"Well, now, if he were to take any further steps—for instance, if he discovered your retreat and claimed you, or at least, asked to see you—?"

"We would let Gaston know, and act as he advised."

"Good!" replied the Regent, but his smile did not betray any great satisfaction. He held out his hand to Héléne and then moved towards the door.

"Oh! Monsieur—" said Héléne in a voice so agitated as to be scarcely audible.

The Duke turned—"Is there anything else I can do?"

"Gaston—may I see him?" The words were breathed rather than uttered audibly.

"You may," replied the Duke. "But, for your own sake, would it not be well to see as little of him as possible?" Héléne's glance sank.—
"Besides," added the Regent, "he is travelling, and perhaps will not return for some days."

"And may I see him when he returns?"

"I give you my promise," replied the Regent, and with that he left her.

A few minutes later, two Nuns, accompanied by a lay sister, made their appearance and prepared to instal themselves in the house.

The Regent, on parting from his daughter, had enquired for Dubois; but had been informed that, after waiting for his Highness more than half-an-hour, that busy individual had betaken himself to the Palais-Royal. In fact, on entering his Minister's quarters, the Regent found him at work with his secretaries, and flanked by a huge portfolio stuffed with documents.

"I tender your Highness infinite apologies," began Dubois as he caught sight of

he Duke, "but as your Highness was delayed and I perceived that the conference was likely to be prolonged, I took the liberty of transgressing your orders, and returned here to resume my work."

"You did well. But I wish to speak to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you."

"To me alone?"

"Yes, yes; to you alone."

"In that case, shall I wait upon Monseigneur in his rooms, or would he prefer to speak to me in my cabinet?"

"In your cabinet will do."

The Abbé indicated the door of his cabinet with a passably respectful gesture of the hand; then, placing the portfolio—which no doubt had been produced in expectation of this visit—under his arm, he followed the Regent into the room.

The Duke threw a glance around him.

"We shall not be overheard?" he asked.

"Overheard; *pardieu!* Double doors everywhere, and a two-foot wall!"

The Regent sat down, and sank into a fit of profound abstraction.

"I am waiting, Monseigneur," remarked Dubois after a pause.

"Abbé," began the Regent suddenly, in the curt tone of one who is not disposed to tolerate any discussion, "the Chevalier is in the Bastille, is he not?"

"Monseigneur," replied Dubois, "his arrival there must have taken place close upon half-an-hour ago."

"Then write to M. de Launay. I wish him to be set at liberty without delay."

Dubois appeared to have been expecting this order. Without making other reply or exclamation, he placed his portfolio upon the table, opened it, extracted a voluminous document, and proceeded to peruse it with exasperating calmness.

"Did you hear me?" said the Regent, after a moment of silence.

"I heard you, Monseigneur."

"Obey me, then."

"Write it yourself, Monseigneur."

"And why?" asked the Regent.

"Because nothing shall induce me to be a party to your ruin," replied Dubois.

"Fine phrases!" cried the Regent.

"Facts, Monseigneur, facts—not merely phrases. Has De Chanlay conspired against your life or has he not?"

"The truth is, he has. But my daughter loves him."

"A fine reason for setting him loose!"

"A reason which will not appeal to you, Abbé, but it is sufficient for me. Let him be released from the Bastille at once."

"Go seek him yourself, Monseigneur; I am raising no obstacle."

"And you knew the secret, sirrah!"

"What secret?"

"That M. de Livry and the Chevalier were one and the same person."

"Well, yes, I did know it. What then?"

"You tried to deceive me."

"I tried to save you from falling a victim to that foolish sentimentality which swamps your reason. Already your pleasures and frivolities exceed the bounds of seemliness for the Regent of France; and now you must needs increase your disabilities as much as possible by giving way to your emotions. And such emotions! Paternal love, by all that's ridiculous! Ordinary love attains its object and burns out harmlessly; but a father's love is insatiable—'tis the most plaguy of all the passions by which a man can be afflicted. It will lead your Highness to commit all manner of absurdities which will take me all my time to counteract. That I am in a position to act like a sensible mortal is obviously due to the fact that I have the good fortune to be childless—for which I can never be too thankful when I observe the miseries and extravagancies of poor devils who are cursed with progeny."

"An excellent homily! But a head more or less is not what I am thinking about. Besides, this De Chanlay will lose all desire to kill me when he learns that it was I who pardoned him."

"Maybe, but a fatal result is quite as unlikely to befall him from a few days' residence in the Bastille. There he must stay."

"And I tell you he shall be liberated this very day."

"It is advisable for his own sake, if only to save his face," continued Dubois, ignoring the Regent's answer. "For were he to leave the Bastille at once, as you suggest, he would be considered by his accomplices, who are now in the prison at Nantes,—I take it you have no intention of setting them free also—as a traitor to the cause, who has received a

pardon for the sake of his services as a spy. To save his honour, the Chevalier must remain where he is."

The Regent reflected.

"Ah, these kings and reigning princes—they are all of a kidney!" cried Dubois, more in scorn than sorrow. "Raise a point of honour, no matter how childish it may be—the whole code of honour is childish—and they will consider it as though it were of serious importance. When will they begin to understand the true maxims of rational policy? . . . Now I ask you, what can it matter to me—what can it matter to France—whether or not Mlle. Hélène de Chaverny, natural daughter of his Highness the Regent, pines or sheds tears for M. Gaston de Chanlay, her lover? Ten thousand mothers, daughters, wives will have cause within the year to weep their husbands, fathers, and sons killed in your Highness's service in the impending Spanish wars, the sole occasion of which will be that your good-nature has been mistaken for weakness of purpose, and your enemies have become insolent from long impunity. The whole plot is within our grasp—let us deal with it as justice requires. This fellow, this De Chanlay, whether chief conspirator or tool, has come to Paris for the express purpose of murdering you. You will not deny it, for I am happy to believe he exposed the whole matter to you in detail. It happens that he is your daughter's lover. A ghastly misfortune, no doubt, for your Highness; but it is not the first misfortune which has befallen you, nor will it be the last. Oh, yes, I knew all about it. I knew of his attachment to your daughter. I knew his name was De Chanlay and not De Livry. Yes, and I held my peace; but it was in order to strike him the more effectively—him and his accomplices—because I am determined it shall be well understood that the Regent is not one of those wooden puppets at a fair which the yokels bowl over in order to show their skill or gratify their love of destruction; or if they happen to miss their shot, slink away without paying the reckoning."

"Dubois, I will never consent to kill my daughter to save my own skin! If the Chevalier is executed, it will cause her death. Therefore I say, spare the man the useless severity of a prison—do not torment a man upon whom we do not

intend to inflict the full penalty of his crime. Since we abrogate his sentence, let us forgive him altogether. Let us have no half-measures."

"Ah, *forgiveness!* a fine word, truly, and often in the mouths of those who lack the courage of their convictions. But are you not growing a little tired, Monseigneur, of continually mouthing those namby-pamby syllables in every variety of tone?"

"*Pardieu!* I'll sing 'em to a new tune this time at any rate, for there is no question of generosity in the matter. Heaven knows I would be glad enough to be able to punish the fellow, if it were only because my daughter sets him so far above her father in her affections. He deprives me of my last and only daughter; but in spite of my animus against him, I hold myself in, I go no farther. De Chanlay shall go scot free."

"By all means let him go free—good Lord! who wishes to prevent it? Only Monseigneur, not just at once—wait a few days. What harm will it do him, I ask you? Deuce take it! it won't kill him to spend a week in the Bastille. He shall be restored to you, your son-in-law never fear! But let things be for a little. Feeble though our administration may be, there is no reason why it should be made a laughing-stock. Remember that even now the requirements of those others down in Brittany are being met and with tolerable vigour, too. Well, those others have mistresses, wives, mothers. Does that trouble you the least in the world? Not a bit of it. You are not so foolish. But just think how the people will laugh if it should become known that your daughter was in love with the man whose mania it was to spit you with his dagger. The illegitimate branch would have something to keep 'em laughing for a month. Madame de Maintenon, who is at death's door, would refuse to die—it would give her a new lease of life. Softly, softly; let the Chevalier have the pleasure of eating De Launay's plump chickens and drinking his wine for a few days. Why, if I mistake not, Richelieu is in the Bastille. Richelieu also is in love with one of your daughters; but the fact failed to soothe your rage when you hurled him into durance. And why? Because he was your rival for the favours of Madame de Parabère. of Madame de Sabran, and

Heaven knows if there were not others besides."

"But what do you intend doing with him," asked the Regent, interrupting his Minister's harangue, "when you have him properly installed in the Bastille according to regulations?"

"Why, for what else should he undergo this little initiation, as it were, except to render him more worthy to figure as your son-in-law! But seriously, Monseigneur, are you thinking of rewarding him in this manner?"

"Oh, confound it! is this a moment to think of anything, Dubois? My only thought is to prevent my poor Hélène being made unhappy. And then again it seems to me that his birth is scarcely sufficient to make him a suitable husband, although the De Chanlays are a fairly good family."

"Is it possible you know them, Monseigneur? Ecod, it needed but that!"

"I have heard the name mentioned, but I cannot recall the circumstances. In the meantime we will see; and whatever you may think, the objection you first raised has decided me: I will not have this man's honour impugned nor his courage called in question. And remember, I am equally resolved that he shall suffer no ill-treatment."

"Oh, as for that, he could not be in better hands than De Launay's. But you are not acquainted with the Bastille, Monseigneur. If you had ever stayed there you would no longer wish for a country seat. In the late King's time it was a prison, I grant you; but under the golden sway of Philippe d'Orléans, it has been transferred into a veritable palace of delights. For pleasant society there is no place to equal it. Every day in the week a fête of some sort is held; a ball or a concert at night; and the King of Spain and his adherents are toasted in bumpers of champagne. 'Tis your Highness who pays the reckoning; and in return you may enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that it is the openly expressed wish of your guests that you may speedily perish and your race become extinct. *Pardieu!* your young friend, Chanlay, will find himself in clover. You do well to pity him, Monseigneur; for he is in a pitiable plight, indeed, poor fellow!"

"Well, well, let that settle it," said the Duke, delighted to have found the easy

middle course. "As for what is to be done later, when we have the report of the inquiry in Brittany, we will see."

Dubois burst into a fit of laughter.—"The enquiry in Brittany!" he chuckled. "Capital! Ah, Monseigneur, I should like to know what more you expect to learn from that enquiry than you have already learned from the mouth of the Chevalier. Is your curiosity still unsatisfied, Monseigneur? *Peste!* I should be more than satisfied, for my part."

"No doubt, Abbé; but it does not happen to concern you."

"No, unfortunately, Monseigneur; for if I were his Grace the Duke Regent of France, I should have elevated myself to a Cardinalship long before this.—But let that pass. It will come about in due time, I trust. Besides, I have discovered a way of helping you out of a difficult business."

"I have small faith in your methods, let me warn you, Abbé."

"Listen, Monseigneur. You are only interested in the Chevalier for your daughter's sake, are you not?"

"And suppose that is the case?"

"How would it be if he should repay her with ingratitude—what then? The young lady is not wanting in pride, Monseigneur; she would soon throw over her Breton admirer. 'Twould be a clever stroke, it seems to me."

"The Chevalier cease to love Hélène! Ridiculous! She is an angel—"

"Such treatment has befallen many another angel, Monseigneur. The Bastille is answerable for many changes of sentiment; and it is a wonderful place for corrupting a man, especially in the society to be found there."

"Well, we shall see; but understand you are to try none of your tricks without my consent."

"Make your mind, easy, Monseigneur. So long as I am allowed to effect my nefarious purposes in my own way, I promise you, that your small family may increase and multiply to their heart's content without interference from me."

"Truly, you are a droll scoundrel!" cried the Regent, laughing. "You will end by making Satan look a fool!"

"Come, I see you begin to do me justice! But now will you go through these papers with me? they have just reached me from Nantes? They will confirm your high opinion of my talents."

"Very well, but send Desroches to me first of all."

"Ah! of course." Dubois rang the bell and repeated the Regent's order.

After a short interval, Madame Desroches, in a great flutter, made her humble entry; but instead of the tempest she

had expected about her ears, she received, with a pleasant smile from the Regent, a gratuity of one hundred louis.

"'Tis beyond me!" ejaculated the duenna mentally. "But it is very certain that young woman can't have been his daughter."



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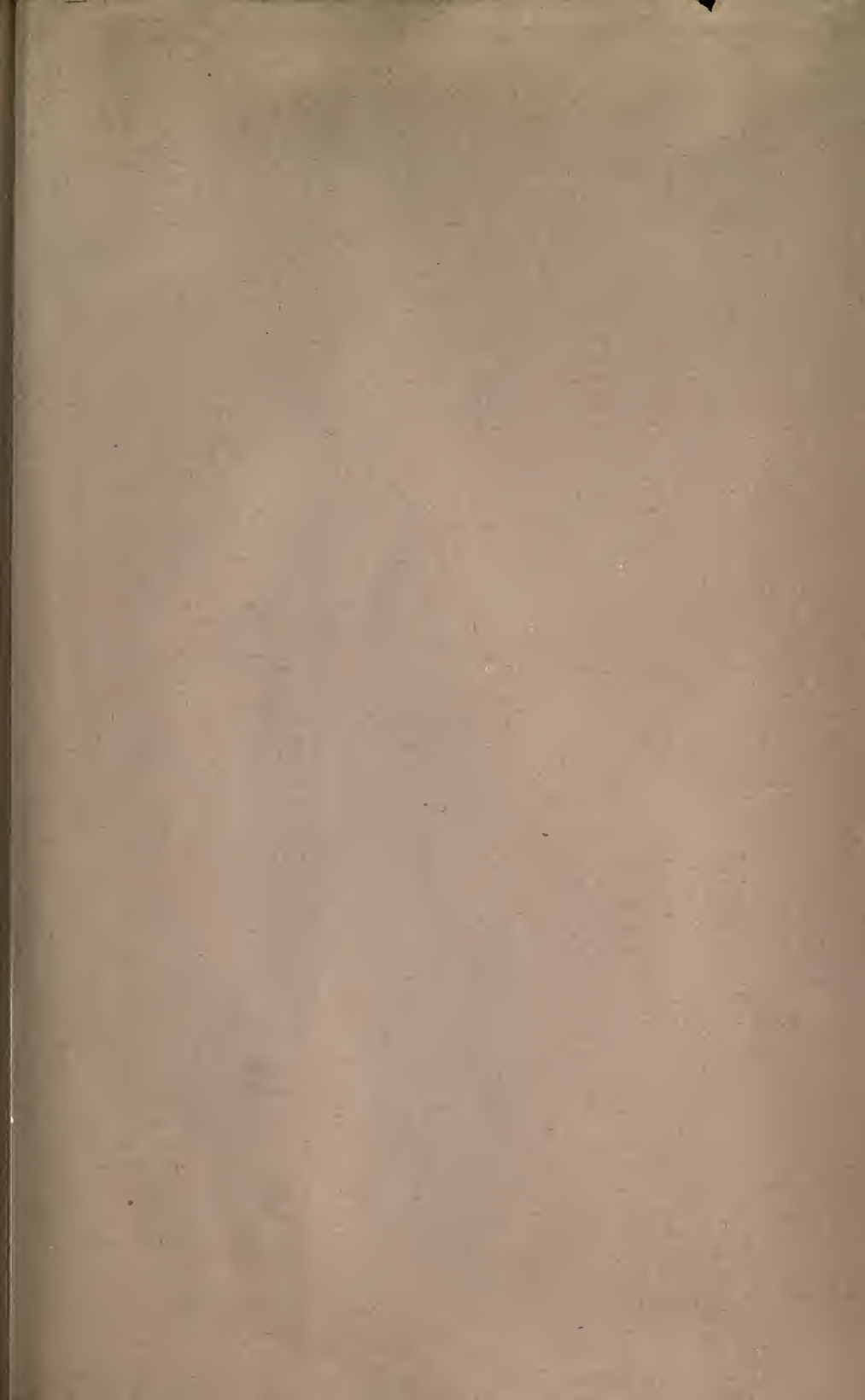
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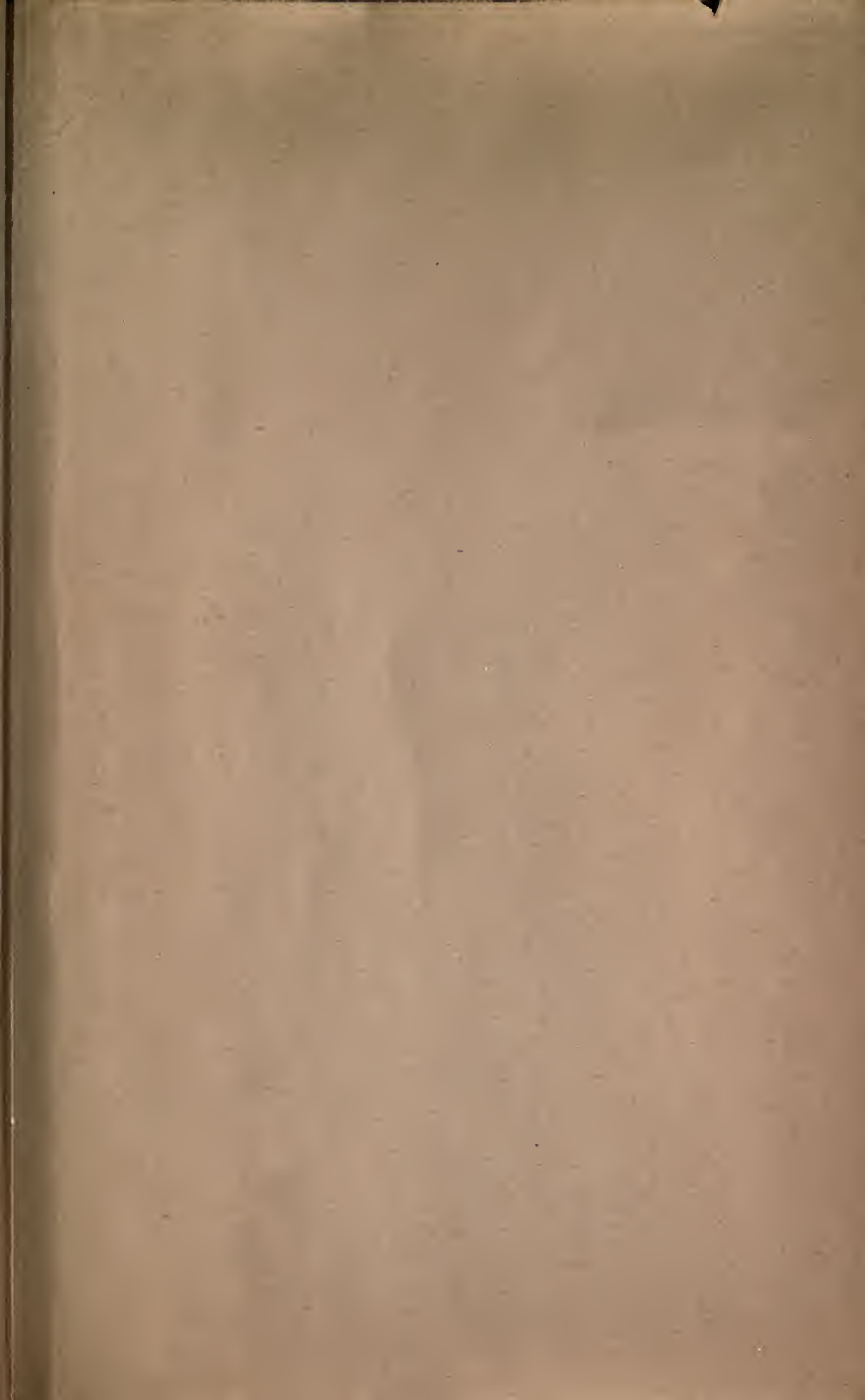
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